poor governance and the knock-or



LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2006

Twin tragedies

Why the law breakers are never punished?

O sooner had the nation begun the grieving process for the horrific garment factory fire on Thursday in Chittagong which has killed at least 54 and seriously burned over 150 others, than we have received the shocking news of the collapse of a multi-storied erstwhile garment factory in Tejgaon yesterday, with the death toll at least 16.

These two incidents are nothing less than national tragedies and must lead us to re-examine the conditions under which garment and other workers toil in this country. We extend our most heart-felt sympathy and solidarity for the grieving families of the dead and the injured, and know that there are no words to express the enormity of their loss. Today, there is no more pressing item on the national agenda than that the safety of workers in the garment sector be ensured. Today, nothing else matters

The garment industry provides well over \$8 billion a year in export earnings and directly employs close to 2 million workers. It is no exaggeration to say that these workers are the very backbone of the economy and that without their back-breaking efforts the nation would grind to a virtual halt.

The very least we owe these hard-working men and women (mainly women) is that they be able to work in safety and security and not have to be fearful of their lives. Over 300 garment workers have died in fires alone in the last 15 years, and perhaps hundreds more have died due to building collapses such as yesterday's in Tejgaon and last year's at Savar. A report by the daily Prothom Alo suggests that there are over 1,500 garment factories that are highly unsafe and that they are an accident waiting to happen.

This disgraceful state of affairs in utterly unacceptable. As a nation, we have a responsibility to step in and rectify this situation on a war footing. Bangladesh has maintained its position in the international garment trade due to low-cost production by the industry. Low costs are all very well, but we should ensure that the industry is not being built by exploiting and endangering the lives of the industry's work-force.

The government must step in and push for reform of the industry. The first step would be to set up a task force, as a matter of highest priority, and put out a comprehensive report on the state of affairs in these factories.

The next step would be to ensure that, in line with the report's findings, all garment factories are made safe, and that this kind of industrial accident never happens again. Ever. We owe the dead, the dying, and those who have survived to toil another day at least this much.

Rising violence in Iraq

Beginning of a civil war?

HE other day as many as 130 were killed in Irag in sectarian bloodshed following the bombing of the third most revered holy shrine of the Shias. This was followed by burning and virtually demolishing a number of mosques of the Sunnis. This rising violence is far from desirable and can bring no good for the people of Iraq. It also has the potential of creating further turmoil in the existing delicate political balance in the region.

This is a problem of the Iraqis, and the Iraqis have to come to an understanding between the various sects and put an end to the highly volatile situation that threatens Iraq's independence and its peaceful coexistence in the region. The main onus in resolving the sectarian violence lies primarily on the leaders of the two main factions, namely the Shias and the Sunnis. Creating a secure environment is also vital for the long-term future and stability of the country. The Iraqis also have to take this aspect of the rising violence into consideration: that this will result into further delay the departure of the US and other foreign armies in Iraq The present spate of violence also does not speak well of the Muslims around the world and is certainly sending wrong signals to other Muslim dominated countries that are already reeling under such sectarian violence. Already too many innocent lives have been lost due to war and foreign interventions, therefore further killings and deaths through internal strife merely adds to the tragedy. The Iraqis must also realize that one wrongdoing cannot be corrected by another, it is also time to reconcile and unite. In the final analysis, Iraq belongs to the Iragis, it must learn to live as one nation, one people. This violence is also slowly and surely damaging the image of the country's historic proud legacy and heritage.



ANM NURUL HAQUE

ANGLADESH has scored the lowest points in the Performance of Public Institutions Index among 117 countries that have been ranked in the Global Competitiveness Report (GCR) 2005-06 produced by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The WEF has taken some important indicators into consideration for judging the performance of the public institutions of the countries under review, competitiveness is defined as the collection of factors, policies, and institutions which determine the level of productivity of a country and that, therefore, determine the level of prosperity that can be attained by an economy

The indicators are: (a) the judicial system and its capacity to allow expeditious, transparent, and lowcost settlement of disputes, (b) the capacity of the government to chanBY THE NUMBERS

Performance of public institutions in Bangladesh

The public institutions must be made accountable to the public as well as the institutional stakeholders to ensure good governance. The government now needs to do some soul-searching and be determined in emancipating the country from the indignity of being the worst performer in so many aspects in the international arena.

nel tax and revenue back to the economy through productivity, (c) the nature of governments' relationship with the private sector, (d) the state of the regulatory environment and layers of bureaucracy and their impact on the costs of business, (e) he extent of inefficient government intervention in the economy, and (f) the prevalence of institutional corruption. It is utterly disgraceful that Bandladesh is placed at the bottom of the Performance of Public Institutions Index among 117 coun-

Bangladesh scored 2.55 points, the lowest among 117 countries that have been covered by the GCR in 200506. The countries scoring less than 3.0 point in terms of performance of their public institutes include: Chad in Africa (2.64), Kyrgyz Republic in Central Asia (2.89), Cambodia in South East Asia (2.90), Ecuador in South America (2.93), and Paraguay in South America (2.97).

Bangladesh's ranking is also the countries worst among the Saarc countries. India is ahead of all the Saarc countries in the index with its ranking at 52nd position (4.52 points). Sri Lanka has been ranked at 100th position (3.34 points) followed by

Pakistan with at the 110th position (3.31). Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives are not included in the list. Denmark and New Zealand have been placed at the top of the Performance of Public Institutions Index with the same score of 6.35 point. They are followed by Iceland (6.33 points), Singapore (6.25 points), and Finland (6.19 points). The WEF has been assessing national competitiveness and accountability, political stability,

releasing their reports on the basis of global competitiveness for more than two decades. The WEF has widened its worldwide coverage from 104 countries to 117 countries while preparing the GCR this year, considering the importance of capacity building in the developing corruption and poor governance lies largely in the fact that certain strategic public institutions, particularly the police, judiciary, taxation and transport, remain largely unreformed. The whole mechanism of governance in the country has been vitiated owing to lack of accountability and transparency in the public institutions.

The Anti-Corruption Commi-ssion (ACC) in a welcome move has sought assistance from the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh Bangladesh has also been (CAG) and his office to fight corruption ranked 141st among 161 countries jointly. It has also called for total comin the 2006 Index of Economic puterization of the audit and account Freedom. The Wall Street Journal department and establishment of a and the Heritage Foundation, a US strong monitoring cell at the CAG based research organization office along with training program to recently published this index. make them transparent and account-Bangladesh has scored the lowest able. The World Bank Country marks among 209 low income Director Christine I Wallich has also countries in 2004 in the World Bank's asked the government to prepare dovernance situation survey. The performance indicators of the Public survey titled "Bangladesh PRSP Finance Management (PFM) and to Forum Economic Update: Recent separate the CAG office from the Developments and Future executive to ensure financial account-Perspectives" was conducted on the ability of the public institutions. basis of six indicators of the governance issue which were voice and

The performance of public institutions, which mainly mould up the quality of governance, wretchedly is worst in Bangladesh. Lack of accountability in the public institutions has been nakedly exposed in all aspects of governance. The Asian Development Bank in its Quarterly Economic Update released on

February 20, has cautioned that

effects of high global oil prices may create a negative impact on the economy. But over the last two decades, the people of this country have witnessed a large and increasing divergence in governance, which has doubled corruption and collapsed rule of law in most of the public institutions. Not only the foreign forums, but also the common people of the country have a similar view on ensuring the accountability of the public institutions.

Strengthening accountability and ensuring transparency in the public institutions are two major components for improving governance. Appointment of a sector-wise ombudsman, cancellation of the Official Secrecy Act for ensuring free flow of information, and creation of massive awareness among the people against corruption are very crucial for improving performance of the public institutions

The public institutions must be made accountable to the public as well as the institutional stakeholders to ensure good governance. The government now needs to do some soul-searching and be determined in emancipating the country from the indignity of being the worst performer in so many aspects in the international arena

ANM Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star

For whom the bell tolls

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ENERALLY, US presidents in their second term ٦ are less focused on populist agenda and more on the legacy they will leave behind and their place in history. According to this premise, the rhetoric by President Bush to continue his quest for democratization of the world should be given due credence, as the arguments proffered by him in favour of democratization are unassailable.

Primarily, it is argued, democracies do not wage wars against other democracies, because wars heralding the end of negotiations spell the failure of democratic values which thrive on discussion and persuasion. Besides, decisions in democracies are distilled through polycentric power bases and can never be unilateral as opposed to dictatorships in which a single leader or an oligarchy can take the ultimate decision of waging war without advice and consent of the people.

The global audience should have little reason to hesitate in accepting the veracity of President Bush's reference in his latest State of the Union address to "the problems originating in a failed and oppressive state" situated a vast distance away from the US mainland in causing murder and destruction in the US. President Bush's conclusion that dictatorships "shelter terrorists, and fuel resentment and radicalism" while "democracies replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their citizens and neighbours," described as "neo-con fantasy" or "democratic vision" by detractors and supporters, are essentially correct. Whether after the invasion of Afghanistan (done with UNSC authorization), the Irag invasion conducted under false pretenses was right or wrong will remain debatable for a long time to come. But if the long drawn out process of government formation in Irag with elected theocracy is any indication of the way things are going, then the US surely has failed to build a foundation for a multi-ethnic state. This premise is strengthened by the reported warning sounded by the US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, to the warring factions

money to midwife the birth of a

fractured Iraq. Though the Blair-Bush duo may take satisfaction from removing a tyrant like Saddam Hussein from power, an unstable Iraq ruled by a conservative Shia majority akin in many ways to Iranian theocracy may endorse rather than renounce terrorism when the world is passing through, in President Bush's words, "one of the most consequential periods of our history.

At the Stanley Foundation Conference on the Future of the Persian Gulf held in Dubai late last year, one of the participants observed that the fact that the Sunni faction in Iraq was never truly a part of the political process, and was only inducted at the insistence of Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice, reflected the difficulty in building a sustainable and cohesive Irag. The Shia-Sunni schism is profound and has transnational coverage. Many fundamentalist Sunnis consider Shias as apostates. There is no reason to believe that a fourteen just because the world's hyperpower has decided on a mission to democratize the Islamic world in the backdrop of the fact that the first, second, and the third waves of democratization (as described by Samuel Huntington) barely touched the Muslim countries. Immediately after the Second World War, John Foster Dulles supported by Lester Pearson, among others, stressed the necessity of forming a military defense mechanism (which later took the shape of NATO) to protect and defend "our cherished freedoms" which included religious faith and Western political and social systems as counter attraction to communism. This unwavering conviction of American leaders as protectors of freedom throughout the world has remained an article of faith ever since the Second World War. President Bush, therefore, only of the Iraqi politicians, that the US reiterated what has been said would not invest manpower and before in his State of the Union

saved liberty in Europe, and liberated death camps, and helped raise up democracies, and face down an evil empire."

In the process, the facts that during the long decades of cold war, in line with George Keenan's policy of containment of Soviet expansionism, the US (and no less the USSR) had repeatedly intruded upon the sovereignty of many countries, engineered the murder of political leaders (till President Ford put a stop to it) and

encouraged "democracy deficit" and kleptocracy in many Third World countries, should not remain as parenthesis but have to be kept in mind

Not then and not now it is not altruism but self-interest that continues to dictate the concert of Western foreign policies. As a matter of fact from Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress to Nixon-Kissinger doctrine of multi-polarity the US policy till the end of the cold war was not aimed at promoting democracy in the Third World but dictators who proved useful in the US efforts to contain communism. The demonization of al-Qaeda its justification aside, should not blur the fact that CIA financed the Talibans and Osama bin Laden's Jihadists through Pakistan's Ziaul Hug to defeat the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Strangely, the Americans at that time had not considered the possibility that the creation of a religion based theocracy may not confine its brutalities within a defined area but would try nuclear issue. to spread its contagion to other countries. One wonders why the Western world failed to distinguish between Islamic fundamentalism which encapsulates the emotional, spiritual and political response of the Muslims to the acute politico-economic crisis in the Middle East and political Islam which aims at establishing a l ebanon global Islamic order through challenging the status quo in Muslim countries and through establishing a transnational net-

America's war on radical Islam. defined by President Bush as "the perversion by a few of a noble faith into an ideology of terror and death," continues. President Bush refuses to allow "radical Islam to work its will by leaving an assaulted world to fend for itself" and promises "not to retreat from the world, and never [to] surrender to evil.

government effectiveness, regula-

tory quality, rule of law, and control of

most acute in Bangladesh and it has

again been crowned as the top

corrupt state in the world for the fifth

consecutive year. The problem of

Corruption is perceived to be

corruption.

An important tool in the American fight against radical Islam would be through the recently enunciated Rice doctrine which seeks to work with the US partners around the world "to build and sustain democracies, wellgoverned states that will respond to the needs of their people and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system."

Condoleezza Rice emphasized that her vision of transformational diplomacy "is rooted in partnership, not in paternalism." Evidently, the Bush administration in its second term is less aggressive and strident in its pursuit of unipolar moment and

by men who suppress liberty at home and spread terror across the world. Power is in the hands of unelected few who have retained power through an electoral prothat ignores the basic cess requirements of democracy."

The fundamental requirement. therefore, is sustained democracy beyond a single election. But Professor Gregory Gause III has guestioned the premise that there is an inverse relationship between the growth of democracy and the reduction of anti-American terrorism because terrorism stems from factors much more specific than the type of regime. Recent moves towards freer regime through elections have produced Hamasled government in Palestine, preponderance of Islamic fundamentalists in Saudi municipal elections, significant Muslim Brotherhood members in the Egyptian parliament, and conservative Shia domination in Iraqi

parliament. These election results strengthen the argument of Harvard Professor Jessica Stern sarily the best way to fight Islamic extremism because its roots can be traced to poverty, madrasa education (as in Pakistan and Bangladesh), or foreign occupation as in Palestine and Iraq. Terrorism in the West can be explained, though not justified, by general perception in the Muslim world of Western double standards on issues like that of Palestine. No one expects Bangladesh to be subjected to external scrutiny as suggested by Gareth Evans (co-chair, International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty), suggesting intervention in case of gross violation of human rights, genocide, famine, or even human cost of anarchy; nor is Bangladesh implicated by Princeton Professor Ann Marie Slaughter's Duty to Prevent, which basically targets closed societies with no opposition; nor is Tony Blair's Doctrine on

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

ing explicit recognition that states nowadays are mutually dependent and that national interests of states are significantly governed by international collaboration, applicable to us. Blair's doctrine was basically meant as a justification for NATO intervention in Kosovo

But while discounting such extreme possibilities, it would be foolhardy to be complacent, given the turmoil through which Bangladesh is now passing through. Repeated warnings are being sounded by the international community that Bangladesh's traditional commitment to democracy and religious pluralism is being threatened by Islamist inspired terrorism.

The latest among these warnings was given by Senator Richard Luger, Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Before him in quick succession were visiting Dutch Minister for International Cooperation, Commonwealth Secretary General, European Union representatives, donor agencies, Bretton Woods institutions, US State Department, etc.

The international community's concerns are based on their fear

that given the present confrontational politics and politicization by the government of state and election related organs, a free and fair parliamentary election with full participation of all parties may not be possible. Such an eventuality would not only destroy domestic peace and harmony but could destabilize the region. In case of large scale breach of peace by Islamic extremists, mass exodus of minority community to India can not be ruled out. Equally, agitation by combined opposition parties would inevitably bring upon them the wrath of both the law enforcement agencies and the ruling alliance's cadres, causing mayhem, death and destruction.

The international community's concerns are based on their fear that given the present confrontational politics and politicization by the government of state and election related organs, a free and fair parliamentary election with full participation of all parties may not be possible. Such an eventuality would not only destroy domestic peace and harmony but could destabilize the region. address: "We are the nation that work of contacts.

Everything possible must be done to put an end to the rising violence in Iraq and help avert possible civil war. Now is the time for the rest of the world and the Muslim community in particular to come to the aid of the Iraqis in a proactive way Serious consideration should also be given to the possibility of using the services of a mediator to resolve the crisis.

lateral mechanism. The current impasse over the Iranian nuclear program is a case in point. Despite reports of precision bombing of suspected nuclear sites in Iran Bush administration, albeit reluctantly, has gone along with EU troika (UK, Germany and France) talks with Iran (though they are getting more disappointed as days go by) and also with Sino-Russian request for more time to find a diplomatic solution to the Iranian

Basically, the Western insistence to deny Iran nuclear capability is because of the nature of the regime described by President Bush as "a nation now held hostage by a small clerical elite that is isolating and repressing its people. The regime that sponsors terrorists in Palestine and

Earlier, dismissing the Iranian presidential election won by Ahmad-Nejad, President Bush described Iran as a country "ruled International Community, contain-

One hopes that such a situation will not come to pass. Repression of the people of Bangladesh resorted to by autocrats and military dictators had never succeeded to thwart their march towards democracy and never will. This lesson of history should not be forgotten

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

He's back

After a year of silence, Osama bin Laden has filled the world's headlines with an audiotape, and the predictable opinions are being heard. Is his offering of a truce a sign of weakness or strength? Is he making such statements because he is harried or is the statement a result of the recent US missile attack in Pakistan? All these questions are to be expected from a media that has usually asked: Is he really alive? Where is he? It rarely asks: What did he say/mean?

Bin Laden's public statements which have almost never been aired in full-length in the US mainstream media - have been made primarily based on his religious/ideological considerations. He has consistently iustified AI Qaeda's actions and those of other jihadi groups as a defensive struggle against Western encroachment on Islamic societies and the 'apostate' regimes currently

he has consistently elaborated basic themes: one-sided US support for Israel at the expense of the Palestinians: U.S. historical and current support for the 'apostate' Muslim regimes, the West's pilfering of the Muslims' natural resources. especially oil; and the West's cultural, political, and military attack on uslims worldwide.

ruling Muslim countries. Moreover.

After the 9/11 attacks in New Brad K. Berner York City and Washington, DC, Al Qaeda was criticised by those within its own ideological persua-

sion, not for having attacked the US, but for not following correct religious procedures. It had failed to get the proper religious/legal rulngs in support of such an attack; had not warned Muslims, women, children, and innocent civilians; and had not made an offer of peaceful resolution - all before attacking.

As of today, all of these conditions have been fulfilled with respect to the next attack in the US

Religious rulings have been obtained. warnings have been issued, and offer of a peaceful tive means. The powers of the wind, the sun resolution - to accept a truce if the US offers one - have been made. In Bin Laden's mind, and in the minds

of likeminded fundamentalist iihadists, all the preconditions have been met for directly attacking the United States. This is the real meaning of the audiotape. Western International University, Phoenix, Arizona

Solution for fuel crisis With the current situation where energy crisis is becoming an inevitable reality, many countries are trying to find solutions for their neverending need for energy and fuel. The constant increase in prices, inflation and unemployment on the rise, and instability in the Middle East which is the supplier of majority of the oil in

Professor

the world, makes it essential that we all ioin in the research to find alterna-

and water have been harnessed in the past to produce energy. Certain countries have used nuclear power for energy but such research not only takes years but also opens up many issues around the world. It appears our choice lies with biodiesel. In Virginia, USA, soybean oil is used to produce a clean-burning fuel. Other bio-diesel refiners are making fuel from waste products like recycled cooking grease. Biodiesel can be used in any vehicle that runs on regular diesel, and delivers critical environmental and economic benefits

Does this mean that we can make use of our agricultural background? Would this research to create methods to convert soybean oil and cooking oil into burning fuel solve more than one problem - unemploynent and energy crisis? In the last

and more people move away from the agrarian economy, but would this be a method to use our greatest

BUET and other institutions should commit to research for better fuel alternatives. Our automobile importers should think of importing hybrids and diesel driven vehicles that are comparatively environmental friendly and require less or other forms of fuel. Our country should find ways to reduce load shedding and find answers to our electricity problem. All this should be done as soon as possible before it is too late. Zeenat Z. Syed Atlanta, GA

Welcome Hasina

Finally, though four years too late. Mrs. Hasina Wazed. Leader of the Opposition, woke up to her constitutional responsibility. Had she performed her constitutionally guaranteed duty diligently from the beginning, instead of engaging in self-destructive continuous strikes. she would have nothing but earned

respect of her countrymen. Mozharul Hoque Springfield, US

Bureaucracy: Points

Many thanks to Mr. Kazi SM Khasrul Alam Kuddusi for writing on the above subject. I would like to add something. In the article he had suggested that before recruiting for the public sector, him. There are some other important factors too. These include office surroundings. social conditions. moral education etc. A fresh graduate does not have a clear idea about corruption and perhaps doesn't even have the intention to indulge in it. When a person is recruited, trained and posted anywhere, he wants to be morally aboveboard. But soon he finds that the situation around him is beyond his control. He finds that the most corrupt persons are holding good positions, and is left with no other alternative but to find a way out; he compromises with the surroundings and gets involved in corruption, unwittingly perhaps. During the Pakistan period and in early Bangladesh period a corrupt person was disliked and despised by the society. But now the situation is quiet the opposite, a hundred and eighty

degree shift. A corrupt moneyed man

is welcome in the society. Another

thing is moral education without which

education becomes incomplete

Proper religious education should be

a must for an employee. It must be imparted in the universities or on-theiob training programmes (in accordance with his/her religion), so that s/he thinks hundred times before indulging in corrupt practices. The writer rightly noted that there is a happy compromise between the politicians and bureaucrats for mutual gains. This happens due to politicisation of bureaucracy. In our country politicians exert tremendous pressure upon officers illegally for their personal gains. So the bureaucrats are bound to follow the assignment given by them. If not, they will face harassment.

After holding the first position in corruption five times consecutively it is time to put a stop to this practice for the sake of the nation. Muhammad Zahangir Nayapara, Jamalpui

few decades we have seen more strength to our advantage?

to ponder

candidates' family-background, record of behaviour pattern, moral character and inner propensities must be given due consideration along with their academic performance. True, family background is a vital factor in determining whether a person in the workforce of the government will misuse the opportunities in front of