

## Calling the army out

*We fail to see the need*

WE, as much as the rest of the nation, have been taken by surprise at the sudden decision of the president to order the army out, to aid the civil authority in the maintenance of law and order. We are not sure what law and order issue, as there is none at the moment, was playing on the president's mind while he took the decision to deploy the army. We are not sure that this is an anticipatory action against any perceived threat that we don't know about.

Nobody contests the fact that the decision is well within the authority vested in the president, the ministry of defence being under him during the interregnum, but we are not convinced that objectivity has been the major determinant of his decision. If it is to help in maintaining law and order ahead of the forthcoming election, calling the army out six weeks before the election is premature, to say the least.

If it is the law and order that has compelled the deployment of the army one would have thought that the situation during the last week of October gave more compelling basis for calling in the army to quell the situation at that time. There is no condition on ground now that has precipitated to a level beyond the capability of the law-enforcing agencies that calls for supplementing their effort by the army's. The recent 14-party programmes were observed quite peacefully with some minor clashes only in some places, and even the siege of the Bangabhaban went off peacefully.

So why this decision, which we understand, was the President's own? Given the fact that the president is also wearing the chief adviser's hat it would have been appropriate under the circumstances to take into account the advisers' dissent, who were not convinced that the current situation merited deployment of the army.

Thus we feel that sufficient ground did not exist to drag the army into this political fray. It is regrettable since the deployment does not in any way provide a way out of the political cul-de-sac that we find ourselves in. The president seems to be oblivious of the negative international impact of his decision. No doubt it will be seen as a serious weakness of our democratic institutions and our failure to move on without army involvement.

What the President and the caretaker chief must do is to rush to remove the political deadlock. The deployment of the army can give him no respite at all. Because, if it is his intention to use it as a ploy to chastise the 14-party alliance he will be ill advised to use it. Only a pragmatic approach and principled position rising above party affiliation will help arrive at a solution.

## Nobel Prize comes home

*Poverty alleviation is now on centre stage of global agenda*

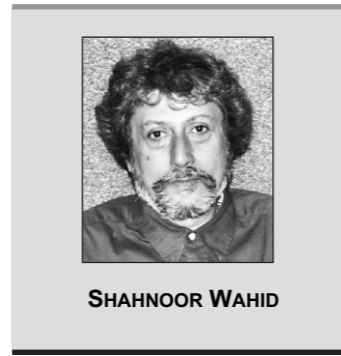
AS the nation watched Professor Muhammad Yunus accepting the Nobel Peace Prize from the Nobel Committee at Oslo on Sunday evening, the thought dawned on us that what was a national pride has now become a global occasion to celebrate. Though the glitter and the ovation in Oslo came in direct contrast to what is happening in the country at the moment, the fact remains that it is not everyday that the world attention is drawn towards Bangladesh for achieving something that is positive and constructive. As Bangladeshis, today we stand tall in the comity of nations, thanks to the hard work and dedication of Professor Yunus and millions of rural women under the micro-credit programme. We feel it is just the beginning of a new era of more work and achieving more laurels.

While we rejoice the occasion we cannot but feel that at the moment there are two sides of Bangladesh, on one a Bangladesh that has won the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition to its innovation, skill and dedication, while on the other we are stuck in a political quagmire. Such lack of consistency and resoluteness in our will and work can certainly pull us back from achieving even greater objectives.

We can conquer poverty only when a peaceful environment will prevail throughout the country and when everyone — political leaders, civil society members, businessmen and development workers will join hands with undivided determination. The time has come to put the agenda of alleviation of poverty on the centre stage of all global thinking and action. The awarding of the prize by the Nobel Committee is a signal that it is as much recognition of individual or institutional contribution, as it is a call for taking the issue up as a global agenda.

We call upon all to reinforce our commitment to together build a better Bangladesh.

## The rule of the unruly



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

**Strangely indeed, throughout the years while in the opposition politicians try their best to draw the attention of the voters with impressive statistics of corruption of the sitting MPs and ministers. But when in power they take no initiative to take action against them or such elements in their own party. They do not even want to make the Anti-corruption Commission properly functional. The reasons are blatantly obvious.**

THE latest report of Transparency International (TI) says that political parties are dens of corruption all over the world, racing ahead of other institutions. Next in line are parliaments, judiciary and police departments. (Note: we put our trust in these institutions as they are supposed to work for social welfare; uphold human rights; uphold democracy and fight against crime and corruption. If judiciary is the third most corrupt institution then where do we go to seek justice?).

These unsavoury facts were released by TI keeping the International Day for Resisting Corruption, which fell on December 9, in view. The survey was conducted in 62 countries of the world by Gallup International, in which about 60 thousand peo-

ple gave their opinions. According to TI, corruption is impacting on the lives of common people in many ways and that one of the common features in these countries is that public representatives are quick to give many promises before elections, but they never keep those once they are elected to power.

In the survey, respondents gave emphasis on the implementation of the UN Convention Against Corruption. By this time 150 countries have signed the Convention and 80 countries have ratified it. For some strange reason Bangladesh was not ratified the Convention. Now the questions that pop up in our minds are: i) Why did the survey not say anything specifically about corruption in Bangladesh, which had come out at the top on five occasions and ii) why did Bangladesh

not ratify the UN Convention?

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman of TIB tells us that Bangladesh was not brought under the gamut of this survey. Nevertheless, he said that the findings were quite consistent with the challenges facing us. And as said earlier, for strange, unknown reasons the Convention was not ratified by the politicians in power, though they were quick to denounce all reports of TI that painted Bangladesh as the most corrupt country in the world. In view of the importance of making the instrument effective, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has urged all the politicians to pledge during their polls campaign that Bangladesh would ratify the Convention against corruption this time around.

As Bangladeshis, such reports did hurt us badly. Therefore, our

question to the politicians: Why did you not ratify the Convention when you had the power to do so? Was it because you did not see any corrupt people around you? Or was it that corruption had suddenly vanished from the blood of those dubious characters in this country? Have the health sector, education sector, transport sector, banking sector, aviation, police, politics and bureaucracy all on a sudden gotten purged of the corrupt-to-the-bone people? If not, then why did you not wage a war against corruption by eliminating such elements from your government and from the administration, thereby creating a laudable example of good governance? Does not checking corruption always remain at the top of your (of all the political parties) election manifesto? Is it not the same song you people sing come

election time?

Strangely indeed, throughout the years while in the opposition politicians try their best to draw the attention of the voters with impressive statistics of corruption of the sitting MPs and ministers. But when in power they take no initiative to take action against them or such elements in their own party. They do not even want to make the Anti-corruption Commission properly functional. The reasons are blatantly obvious. They want the rule of the unruly to continue so that politicians who are worth ten taka could become millionaires in five years. It is the only profession in the world, as the TI report reinforces, that shamelessly thrives on corruption. So, if corruption pays handsome dividends, why eliminate it?

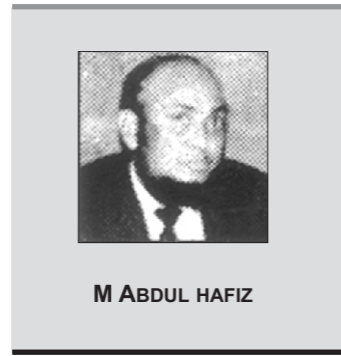
We have witnessed in last fifteen years how politicians have dragged the good name of the country to dirt level. In the name of upholding the spirit of the constitution; human rights; strengthening the democratic institutions and good governance, these politicians have destroyed one institution after another; rampantly violated human rights; made parliament ineffective, thereby destroying all the chances of

consolidating democracy in the country. Today, the nation is sitting on a keg of gunpowder waiting to be blown apart, and none else but the corrupt politicians are responsible for it.

At the risk of sounding quite pessimistic, we are forced to say that there is no hope in sight, no light at the end of the tunnel really. If the next election is held at all then nothing would change. Only the old merry band of looters, or a new band, will come to power and ravage the country with their ravenous hunger. The desire for competent, honest and patriotic people coming to power, as reflected in the recommendations of the citizens' dialogues, is but a far-fetched dream. Therefore, we have to brace ourselves to see more of the rule of the unruly in the years to come. That is not good news at all for a country that has so much of untapped resources and hidden potential to develop like Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore. And where were these countries thirty years ago? And where are we heading for? How long will the rule of the unruly continue?

Shahnoor Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

## Rumsfeld's nemesis and beyond



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

**Will good sense dawn on the Bush administration now? Doubts abound, with the choice of Robert Gates, a CIA veteran as Rumsfeld's replacement. It doesn't augur much optimism to expect a radical shift on Iraq and from Rumsfeld's disaster-prone initiatives. The criterion guiding Bush in the selection of Gates seems to be loyalty, not merit. The new secretary of defence had been a crony of Bush Sr.**

That Bush was most unwilling to let his hatchet man go was aptly borne out by his body language at the White House press conference on the day after what he himself described as a "thumping defeat" of his Republican party at the hands of a resurgent Democrats in the most eagerly anticipated mid-term election in US history.

Rumsfeld's paying for the Republican debacle, considered a backlash to the party's Iraq policy, is just appropriate and axiomatic because, more than any other of Bush's neocon hawks, it was he who personified a policy of recourse to the use of relentless force in Iraq. He strutted on the American and global stage to hawk a policy of unremitting aggrandisement for the world's "indispensable" power to promote Bush's neo-imperialism. He happened to be

the major-domo of the cabal that presented a policy of unbridled application of America's pre-eminent military power without regard to the nuances of legality.

Rumsfeld was naturally marked to become the first "fallguy" because of the American people's disgust with the Bush hawks riding rough-shod over their country's dignity as a bastion of fundamental freedom, civil liberties and the process of law. All these American values, nurtured and revered over two centuries, were trampled under the feet of the neocons who mistakenly thought that America had a God-given right to rule the world. Rumsfeld was in the forefront of such ideological aberration.

He earned his notoriety as a superhawk as far back as 1996 when he put his signature on a public appeal to then president

Clinton demanding that he pursue a policy of "regime change" in Iraq. Ever since then he has become the posterboy of the snooty, swanky and rambunctious cabal of neocons. He led a notorious team composed of stalwarts such as Dick Cheney, Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz et al. who weren't prepared to accept any rival to the US's global hegemony. They disdained international law, despised the UN and often disregarded even the views of the allies.

According to the memoir of Richard Clarke, then serving at the White House as chief of anti-terrorism, it was Rumsfeld who suggested, on the morning after 9/11, an attack on Iraq, a country that had nothing to do with the event, and since then he has epitomised the Bush policy of naked aggression against that country. Rumsfeld was fixated on

Iraq, and in Bush he had a boss who wouldn't ever say no to him. George Bush's questionable induction into the White House enabled the posse of hawks led by Rumsfeld to ride to power on the shoulder of a jejune leader like him to take the Americans off on a course of risky military adventure.

He was unrepentant at every step of the downward slide of a failed policy, and resisted persistent calls to resign from all quarters, from the man-on-the-street to soldiers and generals, although he should have voluntarily resigned the day after the lid was blown off the massive violation of human rights of the preservers at Abu Ghraib.

The mid-term election of November 7 wasn't just another election. It was a referendum, and that too a single-issue referendum on the Bush policy on Iraq. Rumsfeld, the arrogant and acerbic secretary of defence was the embodiment of everything that could be identified with Iraq — its invasion and occupation, and every bit and scrap of a terribly botched policy. So it's a befitting come-uppance for his head to have rolled in the dust as soon as the heat of the campaign against his Iraq performance was over at the polls. His fall is a categorical

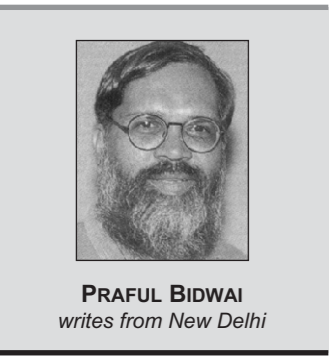
victory for the American people who were fed up with the warmongers' shenanigans.

Will good sense dawn on the Bush administration now? Doubts abound, with the choice of Robert Gates, a CIA veteran as Rumsfeld's replacement. It doesn't augur much optimism to expect a radical shift on Iraq and from Rumsfeld's disaster-prone initiatives. The criterion guiding Bush in the selection of Gates seems to be loyalty, not merit. The new secretary of defence had been a crony of Bush Sr.

Rumsfeld, either voluntarily or under compulsion, has finally bowed out of the script on Iraq after inflicting incalculable damage on Iraq, and much more on the prestige and dignity of the great country he was called upon to serve. This, by itself, may provide the chance for a turn of events. There may be a perceptible shift in current US policy on Iraq in the remaining two years of a lame-duck president Bush who, unencumbered by any concern of facing the electorate again, can take enormous initiative for the positive — at least to secure his place in history.

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

## From Khairlanji to Kanpur and beyond



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

**Prasad & Co are more concerned to create a new class of Dalit millionaires than to redress the Dalit masses' problems. These are worsening under the impact of globalisation, privatisation, and liberalisation -- leading to greater inequalities, and displacement and dispossession of the poor -- which these globalisers favour. Their agendas can't strike a chord among ordinary Dalits.**

September 29, formed their real backdrop -- and produced the trigger.

In that episode, four members of the Bhotmange family, including two women, were killed by a caste-Hindu mob because two of them appeared as witnesses for another Dalit victim of casteism. All four were paraded naked and the women gang-raped before being killed.

Khairlanji's shame was compounded by the Maharashtra government's monumental callousness -- especially the police's failure to register the crime under the SC and ST Atrocities Act -- and the supine response of the Dalit leadership, which didn't even mention the outrage in hundreds of big meetings held days later, on the 50th anniversary of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism.

Khairlanji exemplifies the intensity and pervasiveness of the discrimination Dalits face despite decades of job and educational quotas. Education doesn't guarantee better treatment, nor does economic status. The Bhotmanges were educated and owned five acres of irrigated

land. They were lynched because they asserted their rights.

Despite its exceptional violence, Khairlanji conforms to a pattern of exclusion, sanctioned by religion and custom, which stretches all the way from the remotest village to elite institutions in the heart of India's capital.

At the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, India's best-known teaching hospital, Dalit students suffer a system of apartheid, run with the authorities' connivance. AIIMS' Dalit students cannot live in upper caste-dominated hostels or eat at the same table. The government recently appointed a committee to investigate AIIMS. The Institute administration refused to cooperate with it.

Numerous other medical colleges too have been sites of upper caste domination. They played a pernicious role in recent agitations against quotas for the other backward classes. Dalit students are particularly vulnerable in such colleges given the system of internal evaluation, typically by prejudiced upper-caste examiners. They cannot

protest against discrimination for fear of being further victimised.

Ordinary Dalits are worse off than those who make it to professional courses. For instance, the repugnant practice of manual scavenging still persists. An estimated 6.8 to 13 lakh Dalits continue to carry human excreta. It's clear that the deadline (2007) for eradicating this disgraceful practice won't be met, perhaps not even by 2010.

Reports of national and state-level Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Commissions reveal persistent and all-encompassing anti-Dalit discrimination, reflected in unpaid labour and humiliating practices such as barring Dalit women from covering their heads while passing through the upper-caste segment of a village.

Khairlanji is only one thread in a web of hierarchical social relationships and victimisation by virtue of birth, sanctioned by the Dharmashastras. Khairlanji also exposes the yawning gap between Dalit masses and political leaders. The leaders have lost touch with reality. Many are distrusted by the masses for their

lack of identification with their constituency's problems, their lavish lifestyles, and their corruption.

India is now witnessing the emergence of a third-generation post-Ambedkar Dalit leadership. The first generation consisted of veteran Republicans and Congressmen like Bhaurao Krishnarao Gaekwad, BP Maurya, Dadasaheb Rupawate, RS Gavai and Jagjivan Ram. It got quickly discredited.

The second generation, represented by the Dalit Panthers -- who made a revolutionary beginning in Maharashtra 35 years ago -- has also been co-opted. One of its brightest stars, the great poet Namdeo Dhasal, now sings paeans to Tinpot Dictator Bal Thackeray. Other leaders, like Prakash Ambedkar, Ramdas Athavale and Jogendra Kavade, only have a limited following.

Most of the rest stand marginalised. Mayawati is the unquestioned leader of UP's Dalits, whose influence is growing in other states too. Although she's emerging as India's foremost Dalit leader, she lacks a strategy for social transformation along secular, egalitarian lines.

None of these leaders combines Dr Ambedkar's dual agenda -- of Dalit representation and radical, inclusive social change. The sole exception may be the Justice Party's Udit Raj.

The Dalit protests have put the



third-generation leadership on test: It must sense the masses' mood and articulate their aspirations, or face total isolation.

However, Khairlanji makes one thing clear. Most Dalits have no use for the brand of identity politics that intellectuals like Chandra Bhan Prasad propound, centred on celebrating the birthday of Thomas Babington Macaulay, the founder of the colonial system of educating local clerks. Some Dalits have even invented a new deity, the English language.

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Dalit millionaires than to redress the Dalit masses' problems. These are worsening under the impact of globalisation, privatisation, and liberalisation -- leading to greater inequalities, and displacement and dispossession of the poor -- which these globalisers favour. Their agendas can't strike a chord among ordinary Dalits.

The present moment confronts Indian society with a challenge: how should it address continuing Dalit oppression? If reservations haven't done the job adequately, should the state try other forms of affirmative action, including

aggressive public education, sensitisation of upper-caste groups, and stricter laws to punish caste discrimination?

At the level of civil society, can India afford not to have a reform movement, which combats social pathologies involving deep-rooted discrimination based on birth? How might such a movement be launched to campaign for a more inclusive society?

These questions can no longer wait for an answer.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.