

Ignominy for Clinton

The impeachment of President Bill Clinton by the United States House of Representatives on Saturday shocked many, but surprised few. The House voted to impeach Clinton on two counts, namely perjury in front of a Grand Jury and obstruction of justice. It is noteworthy that the impeachment process had little to do with Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Clinton's attempts to deny the truth under oath and his alleged efforts to prevent others from telling the truth formed the basis of impeachment. This runs parallel to the Watergate scandal which brought down Richard Nixon in 1974. Nixon was not threatened with impeachment because he had ordered the burglary of the Democratic Party headquarters, but because he had attempted to subvert justice by trying to cover it up.

The impeachment of Clinton, the first time a US president has been handed down such an ignominy by lawmakers for over a century, has demonstrated the power of the law, supremacy of the Constitution and strength of American institutions of governance. This has been an extraordinary demonstration of what is really meant by the word 'accountability', which has made the most powerful political office in the world look so humble. What the House vote has proved, is that no one is above the law, no matter how popular he is. The question is, what next for Clinton?

The Clinton camp is hoping that the requisite two-thirds majority would not be forthcoming when the matter goes to trial in the Senate. Clinton believes that he was most unfairly hounded by his opponents, and that the American people are firmly behind his leadership. This has created the ground for his repeated refusal to consider resignation. However, it is doubtful whether the US president should read so much into public opinion polls. The real damage has already been done. Clinton now holds the dubious distinction of being only the second president in 222 years of US history to have been impeached. His personal authority and the prestige of the office of the president now lie in tatters. He may continue in office for the next two years, but it would be a hollow, rather than hallowed, office that he would hold. It now remains to be seen whether Clinton can rise above personal ego, and place the interest of the office of the president above himself.

Welcome Ramadan

Comes again the holy month of Ramadan with its message of restraint and self-control for the Muslims of the world in particular and people of this planet in general. The rituals of Ramadan consisting of fasting from sunrise to sunset for a month and saying prayers, abstaining from taking food and drinks, practising self-restraint, controlling ill-manners and temper are all designed to make human beings the best creation of Allah and this world a better place to live in peace and happiness. Ramadan is also the important month of the Islamic lunar calendar because in this month the Holy Quran was revealed. Muslims have very few religious occasions to rejoice and Ramadan is one of them. Pious Muslims love to fast and at the end of the day break it with a variety of delicious dishes prepared from pulses, vegetables, onions and fruits. The result is a strong demand for these items in the market. Prices of these essentials are already on the rise and the machinations of unscrupulous traders may trigger a price spiral that can make the holy month sour to many citizens. We strongly urge the administration to maintain a close vigil on the price situation in the wholesale and retail markets. Let it not be said that in the name of free economy people are subjected to unnecessary suffering resulting from spiralling prices.

We also fervently request our political leadership to set examples of restraint and reconciliation for the politics-battered people of Bangladesh. Let the two major political parties seize this opportunity and show the nation that they are willing to lead the people by example and not by rhetoric alone. Let political peace also prevail not only during this holy month, but all through the whole year.

Community Policing

Postponement of Saturday's citizens' rally in Chittagong, designed to encourage people's participation in the crusade against crime, in the face of vehement opposition from the ward commissioners and some political leaders was due to, in our view, a lack of co-ordination among people who matter. The police commissioner, who is also the chairman of the Chittagong Metropolitan Community Policing Porichalan Parishad (CMCPP) and was to address the rally as chief guest, related the ward commissioners' opposition to ignorance about the concept of community policing. On the other hand, the police official was accused of acting against the "interests and activities of the government." What comes out of this bickering, however, is the fact that neither the police nor the politicians felt the need to talk to each other on the issue.

The police commissioner was certainly wrong in assuming that the ward commissioners should know what the rally was all about. Shouldn't he have talked to them in the first place and make them understand the community police is a concept conceived and nurtured by the government itself? Similarly, while we respect the ward commissioners' view that the police commissioner, as a government official, cannot address a public rally, we also believe that they should have arranged the rally so that a regular citizen knows what the police is doing, or planning to do, to curb crimes.

There was report of intervention from a minister and the inspector general of police and stipulating that the intervention was timely, we expect them to not just stop there but work towards ensuring better co-ordination among the police, politicians and public.

We believe that the concept of community policing, if realised, would go a long way in curbing the alarmingly deteriorating law and order situation in the country. We hope the rift among politicians and police in Chittagong would soon disappear, and both will do what they are expected to do — serve the people.

Southeast Asia

The Old Order Changeth

The economic turmoil has already wrought one fundamental change in the politics of Southeast Asia — the fall of 32-year old Suharto regime. The tumult has also resulted in political changes elsewhere. In Thailand it brought in a new government last year. It has helped persuade Fidel Ramos not to try for another term in presidency.

posed stability in the region bred corruption, cronyism and also authoritarian trends. With the voice of protest choked those were multiplied over the years allowing hardly any benefit of the prosperity to trickle down to the poor. The consequent turmoil in the South Asian countries is, in a way, the result of the success of the economic policies pursued by them — at least until recent times. A new middle class — educated and assertive — is no longer willing to believe what the governments tell it. And a basic sense of justice has been offended. The feelings are pervasive that is denied of its dues. Moreover the policies of the international financial institutions did not always produce desired results in the existing political systems of the South Asian countries. Yet the old gaurds of the region like Suharto's Indonesia, Mahathir's Malaysia as well as new ASEAN members Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam remained obsessed with stability at any cost while expecting the best of the free economy.

All those who belong to Southeast Asia's political establishments of the 60s or the conservative camp of the region despised unbridled western influence although some of them practised democracy in their own way or atleast professed it. Out of them Dr Mahathir had been a staunch critic of West's liberalism and Human Rights standard and together with Singapore's Lee Yan Ku consistently upheld a homegrown Asian way in defiance of West's

package of its value system. With the end of Suharto era, Mahathir's views might soon lose the support of Indonesia which is already in transition and halfway between liberalism and a hang over of the past. There are dissent also elsewhere. But the biggest crack in the monolith of the old guard appears to be in Malaysia itself which tenaciously guarded the right of its own choice as regard its dealing with IMF and has been able to go it alone by imposing stiff exchange controls and isolating her economy

Habibie of Indonesia called off his planned visit to Kuala Lumpur and Vice President Al Gore of the USA called on Anwar's family in Kuala Lumpur in a bizarre display of his country's solidarity with Anwar's cause. A large number of intellectuals, politicians and officials of the region chagrined over Anwar's ordeal contacted

Muhammad, the Prime Minister, is more than just clash of personalities and in fact emblematic of a broader struggle across the region. The old order established in the 1960s is fading and the forces of reform are battling those of reaction. The 'reformers' clamoured by the new brand of the region's leaders encompasses a drive against corruption and change to a more responsive, pluralistic political system.

The emerging debate in Southeast Asia is not new. But it heated up when Anwar Ibrahim, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia — an in-

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

from external speculative pressures.

With the proliferation of new ideas and outlook some of the ASEAN partners have already started what they call 'straight talks' because according to them the internal policies of one country could affect all. This is apparently going to breach the Southeast Asia's hallowed principle of 'non-interference' in neighbours' affairs and give a new twist to the region's politics. The situation turned ominous when in wake of Anwar Ibrahim's arrest President Estrada of the Philippines showed reluctance to visit Malaysia so long his friend Anwar was behind bars, presi-

tential in his own right — wrote an article recently urging the ASEAN to start considering 'constructive interventions' in its members' affairs because 'all of us in the region are our brothers' keepers' bound by 'core humanitarian values'. It is this vision which is contested by the ASEAN's old guard now led by Dr Mahathir. Anwar Ibrahim represents the ideal of a new generation of leaders — clean, cultivated and liberal. He is patriotic but outward looking — ready to introduce all political and economic reforms prescribed by the IMF irrespective of its consequence for the country's stability. So his tussle with his former boss Mahathir

will be held for the moment. He can still ensure himself a convinc-

Governor's Rule in Sindh

The First Few Weeks

The turf battles between the PM's circle of advisors on Sindh over power apportionment must stop and the Governor allowed to get on with it. We are fighting against time more than anything else, presently we are losing the battle. We have the means to solve our problems, in the face of vested interest, do we have the will?

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

are occupied by persons in whom the intelligentsia and the public do not have much confidence. The mass perception is that only non-controversial clean individuals must occupy these posts. Governor's rule will hardly be able to change the attitude or the corruption potential of subordinate staff, particularly at the SHOs, Head Constable level but really what he has to do is to find people from the ACs and DSPs upwards who will honestly deliver the goods and be held accountable for their actions.

The buzzword in the general public is Metropolitan Police. The CPCO Chief Jameel Yousaf, his close associates and supporters are pushing for this, they have the support and input by eminent personnel like Ardesir Cowasjee. The Metropolitan Police is a brilliant idea and is a must for every major city in the country particularly for Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan and Hyderabad as well as Quetta and Peshawar. The Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in Pakistan, in particular the police, have been badly corrupted and with the core of their credibility destroyed, have become largely ineffective.

The Metropolitan Police idea puts in place an effective law and order mechanism that will maintain peace on a permanent basis in this Metropolitan City with widely diverse population. Obviously the police officers chosen must be well-educated and must invariably belong to this city and province so that there is a measure of commitment that may

be lacking in people who have no real roots in the area. One must agree with the concept of the Police being non-political and even-handed. At this time they are mis-used mainly for political purposes and in their turn reveal in nepotism, favouritism and corruption. Their credibility has been eroded in a vicious cycle that they cannot seem to break out of.

It is moot point, however, to have the Metropolitan Police idea function in the absence of a city government. Unless a powerful central executive, preferably elected by adult franchise, is running the city the net result is likely to be erosion of the Metropolitan Police idea itself.

At the moment too many mafias operate in the electricity, gas, water, telephone, garbage cleaning, education and health as well as disciplines like construction mafia, the land grabbers, sand mafia, water tanker mafia etc., of all whom have vested interests in operating independently, not excluding the Employees Social Institutions and the Old-age Benefit Institution.

The vital issue therefore is power to the people and that can only be effected through Local Bodies Elections. This will ensure that in every locality there

is an elected representative of grassroots level to whom the people of the locality can turn for resolving various issues that they are facing in day-to-day life. Therefore, Local Bodies Elections up to the District Level is a must, it being only the effective way to contain the mafia influence in various sectors.

The Governor would do well to have Central Control Room (CCR) manned round the clock which will obtain real time information from the Divisions, Districts and Sub-divisions on various matters so that the information is available to the Governor and executive authority in the bureaucracy can be prodded to take remedial measures. The CCR must function as a clearing house for information and executive action, acting specially to resolve major issues. Swift action by the Governor will ensure credibility of governance which is so sadly lacking at all levels of civilian executive authority in Pakistan.

It is impossible to imagine any corporate entity having large amount of manpower and various job specifications that does not have executive functioning 24 hrs a day. This arrangement also functions as a Crisis Control Centre so that

immediate decisions can be taken as and when necessary.

The Central Control Room (CCR) concept is nothing new or unique, why anyone does not implement in a country where such a mechanism is absolutely vital is difficult to imagine.

One of the reasons of the present peace and tranquillity in the city is the formation of military courts under Article 245 to try cases of terrorism, etc. The only negative factor is that we cannot make time finite for delivering justice. Where justice delayed is justice denied, in the same manner justice hurried may result in injustice, the prosecution in its enthusiasm to get the accused convicted may over-step its parameters of integrity of evidence. Two or three military courts must be put up immediately dedicated to trying cases of false evidence, the punishment awarded being the same punishment that would have been awarded to an accused if the false evidence was successful in convicting the accused.

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