

On the Verge of Ungovernability?

JUST about anything can trigger transport bashing in the streets of Dhaka. This endemic disease is causing the worst kind of civic rights violation ever encountered in any society and yet we remain a mute spectator to it.

Automobiles become targets of wholly misplaced wrath and onslaught from a variety of reasons such as in the backlash of a road accident, fight between mastan or feuding student groups, disappointment over toll collection, murder in a locality, or even as a diversionary tactic to sweep a bigger crime under the carpet.

So, the underlying reason behind smashing cars, pelting stones, gun-toting, barricading roads, even damaging shops at the slightest pretext is the drastic decline in the respect for law that one sees all around. And this disrespect is rooted in the double standards that the governing party applies in the matter of enforcement of law.

It devolves upon our political leadership, especially of the ruling party in the present context, to lead the way in restoring respect for law in the country. If the right kind of political will is mustered for a cause it does prove effective.

Challenges for George Bush

WE extend our congratulations to George W Bush, president-elect of the United States of America. After a gruelling 18-month campaign, and weeks of unprecedented legal challenges, a Supreme Court ruling against a vote recount in Florida ultimately made Bush the winner.

One of the most difficult and immediate challenges for Bush is to deal with a divided America. Although he relies on support from the extreme right wing, Bush has described himself as a "different kind of Republican: Conservative, but compassionate and capable of reaching out across party lines to work with Democrats."

Republicans have been celebrating their return to the White House after eight long years, but one of the most daunting questions that Bush must answer is how he will deal with the legacy of Bill Clinton, especially in the arena of foreign policy.

Barak's Resignation: Future of Peace Process Uncertain

ARIEL Sharon has finally succeeded in throwing Ehud Barak out of the Prime Minister's position. Barak already tendered his resignation to the President of Israel. In my last comment I said Ariel Sharon would destroy the peace process and along with it Ehud Barak.

Despite extreme violence the general expectation was that he would, with the temporary support of the Shaas party, continue as Prime Minister and move fast to complete the peace deal with the Palestinians.

In his latest statements Barak has not mentioned Jerusalem as the undivided eternal capital of Israel. If he continues to stick to this, it's possible that he would go for some form of shared sovereignty of Jerusalem...

enough security guarantees which is the major concern for the Israeli public. Barak had a fairly good chance to get the public approval provided the deal was good enough in terms of peace and security for the Israeli public.

Instead of choosing such a path Barak went ahead with a bang though keeping open the option of negotiations with Palestinians for striking a deal. He said he wanted fresh mandate on the peace negotiations. Indeed, Barak was elected on the peace option.

All these put Barak completely downhill in terms of his handling of the situation as well as domestic politics.

Barak now faces total uncertainty about his political future. Though he said he had no objection to having both Prime Ministerial and Parliamentary polls



Spotlight on Middle East Muslehuddin Ahmad

simultaneously within 60 days, his strategy apparently was to go ahead immediately as according to Israeli law only a Knesset (Parliament) member could contest the election for the post of Prime Minister.

Sharon who started the mess and his victory would make things terribly worse.

As the situation now stands, Barak's calculations may prove wrong, Israeli Knesset may dissolve itself and in that case Netanyahu would certainly challenge Barak who has been nominated by Labour party for contesting Prime Ministerial election.

Barak apparently went by two considerations: (i) no formidable challenge if Netanyahu was not in

the field, (ii) the promise of a peace deal with the Palestinians with enough security to Israeli public. His calculation in both may turn out wrong.

On the peace issue Barak already had two years and could not deliver anything except the worst violence that Israel has seen for decades.

However, Barak stands a chance only if he can show to the Israelis that it was Sharon with support of his Likud party to which Netanyahu belongs was fully responsible for the present disaster.

The New American President and South Asia

South Asian nations like other have felicitated the president-elect expressing hope that his tenure would see strengthening of the bilateral ties with their respective countries... Bush and his team will do a good job if they take into account the economic and social problems in the poverty-ridden region of more than one billion people.

highest position of the nation. His father George Bush was the president but lost the re-election to the now outgoing president Bill Clinton, who is leaving the office on January 20 after two terms.

What impact the new president will make in the world since it will be a departure from the administration and political party which ruled the country for last eight years? Had Al-Gore won the electoral college, there would have been a change of person in the White House but not much in policy because the same Democrat party and much of the policies of the Clinton administration of which Al-Gore was the second important man would have continued.

democratic Russia despite differences. While this situation has helped flourish democracy across the world, this has also largely eliminated a deterrence in the form of the former superpower Soviet Union which often challenged many American positions in global affairs.

As such, the American president now assumes more importance than before although the man who sits in the Oval office is always a powerful person. US elections have always attracted worldwide attention and evidently the degree of interest is greater now for obvious reason near-monopoly of American ascendancy in the global matters.



Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

close so much so that only a few hundred votes in the Florida state favoured Bush for the presidency while Gore won more than three lakh and 37,000 votes than his rival although he lost.

American elections are a somewhat complicated system. The outcome is not decided by the popular votes but by the electoral college votes. The EC votes is an indirect system when each state has a number of electoral votes equal to its total number of representatives in both houses of Congress.

such votes to win the elections. The electoral vote in each state are allocated on a winner-take-all basis and as such a candidate who wins the popular votes in a state also wins all the electoral votes in that state.

Al-Gore and George Bush differed considerably on domestic policies on tax plans, education, social security and health. Gore clearly counted on the performance of the Clinton administration during the last eight years that saw a tremendous propensity and growth in



the economy. Bush harped on the need for a change and said much of the values that was followed during the Clinton era is not that of America's own. This refers to president Clinton's personal scandals and other issues.

In matters of foreign policy and defence, they have both convergence and divergence of views. Both seemed more or less same on the issue of Middle East as they appear hardliners in support of Israel.

administration is likely to be less receptive to the calls for additional foreign assistance to developing countries.

A separate South Asian bureau was set up on the foreign policy desk of the United States not too long ago considering the huge number of people living here. Ms. Robin Rahpel was the first assistant secretary of state in charge of the desk. She was succeeded by Karl F. Inderfurth who made routine swing the region. Indeed, this bureau reflects greater American importance to the area. It remains to be seen how much importance the new government attaches to the region.

South Asian nations like other have felicitated the president-elect expressing hope that his tenure would see strengthening of the bilateral ties with their respective countries.

For Bangladesh, a change in the governance in the US can make things a bit different. As the Republicans have now come to power, there will certainly be a change in the administration involving the key persons. For instance, energy secretary Bill Richardson is known as a good friend of Bangladesh. He was the first to announce at a seminar during his visit to Dhaka nearly three years ago that president Clinton would visit Bangladesh.

Whatever be the priority of the new administration in South Asia, Bush and his new team will do a good job if they take into account the economic and social problems in the poverty-ridden region of more than one billion people and contribute towards eliminating myriad problems in these areas.

All is Not so Peaceful in the Pacific

by Badrul Khan

What is the point of believing in military threat when there is a general decline in the number of interstate warfare so that conflicts tend to show a stable pattern of intra state rivalries such as civil war and genocide, rather than inter state aggression? Why then upgrade the defence forces with transport aircraft, new battlefield helicopters, new air warfare destroyers, airborne refuelling and airborne early-warning aircraft? Would it not mean, contrary to the reality, that Australia is trying to spawn conflicts or falsely envisioning future rivalries which are either not there or whose possibilities are preposterous to believe?

contracts. It will also be hailed in areas and cities in Australia where people see military bases as being the big money spinner. If that becomes a reality, the world could soon be accustomed with the vision of Australian troops landing in Fiji, Tahiti, Samoa, Papua New Guinea or in pockets of Indonesian Archipelago with vast fleet of armoured personnel carriers, trucks, four helicopter, and transport aircraft ready for combat.

It also calls for a boisterous debate within Australian society and politics already divided into two camps. The existing political divide would be happy to argue over whether Australian defence force should always be committed to its expeditionary role overseas and thus structure it in tune with that aim. The continental school would instead pursue Australia's

own defence where any notion of extending the horizon of intervention is discarded.

The point however is many are not prepared to readily accept the premise upon which the paper relies. Meant mostly to satisfy the war strategists in America, many argue that the proposed shift de facto remains more predicated upon changes in American strategy rather than the strategic need of Australia. Events that have triggered those changes are many. First, America has come to realise that policing the world alone, by way of direct intervention, is risky and fraught with adversities.

Secondly, aerial bombing from high altitude has proved to be far safer as a method of intervention than marching the army over a terrain, which is hostile and filled with uncertainties. This strategy seems to have worked in the Balkan and the Middle East, predicating that a new thrust be placed on high tech war rather than the conventional belief in army to be the mother of all wars.

again. In a bid to coin a new strategy, it is for America imperative to see others shoulder and share some of the roles that once fell solely on her. This could be attained by localising the role, and leasing regions, deemed to be strategically important, to countries, whom United States can count upon.

Thirdly, America has already gained strategic control over regions, which it was not so sure of few years back. For example,

the last bastion of communism in the Balkan is now only a galaxy of tiny and depleted states, no more potent to raise an ideological, let alone a military storm that could have buffeted America's interest in Europe. The vital oil pipelines are also secure with the untamable Saddam already subdued. More significant in this chain of success is the liberal wind blowing in Iran with the balance of power now shifting towards reliable and confident Pakistan, who stands at the vantage point of being able to simultaneously control the Taliban as well as putting Iran on check.

What is most contentious in the white paper, not escaping the prudent mind of analysts who are hardly given to emotion, is the notion of direct military threat to Australia. What is the point of believing in military threat when there is a general decline in the

number of interstate warfare so that conflicts tend to show a stable pattern of intra state rivalries such as civil war and genocide, rather than inter state aggression? Why then upgrade the defence forces with transport aircraft, new battlefield helicopters, new air warfare destroyers, airborne refuelling and airborne early-warning aircraft? Would it not mean, contrary to the reality, that Australia is trying to spawn conflicts or falsely envisioning future rivalries which are either not there or whose possibilities are preposterous to believe? In fact, the myth of interstate war means that Australia, in the name of national security, will be automatically dragged into all small, insignificant hotbeds of conflict. And this will happen despite the assurances Australia has given to the region in general that the role forecast in the paper does not denote any hostile or aggressive stance. There is however every reason to believe that the future battlefield for Australia could well extend from the east of Pacific to the west where mighty China or North Korea may pose a threat to Taiwan or South Korea. It seems pushing boundaries of military engagement further offshore would be a temptation hard to resist for Australia.