Dhaka, Tuesday, December 19, 2000

On the Verge of Ungovernability?

TUST 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. While hoodlums make a bonfire of it and victims agonise over loss of property and writhe like rustling leaves in mortal danger of their lives we are basically looking through the barrel of the rule of law's approaching liquidation.

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. Buses and cars are also caught in the whirlpool of demonstrations spearheaded by various bodies. large or small, to articulate their professional demands. Police barricade, demand for postponement of examination dates, and even defeat in a sporting event can bring about a transport smashing free for all. Manifestly, it is not the doing of an individual but of a mob waxing confident of their luck with the blindfolded law.

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. In other words, no matter how lofty and mouthful they may sound about their nonpartisan application of law they end up doing the exact opposite. When something happens as a result of opposition activism hurriedly does it draw the pejorative of a law-breaking incident. But if the same thing had been done by ruling party elements it would be explained away as an expression of Vox Populi or public outcry. The police role is only tailor-made to that partisan demand of the ruling party, so that the law goes unapplied at the worst and gets underapplied or misapplied at best. The whole raison d'etre behind the PSA is demolished by the manner in which the instrumentality of law has been rendered impotent before the anarchic behaviour of a handful among the citizenry.

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, the case in point being the prohibition of public meetings in the streets. Needless to say, it will be suicidal to let the country become ungovernable.

Challenges for George Bush

TYTE 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. In the electoral vote, Bush defeated vice president Al Gore by the narrowest possible margin, and he clearly lost the popular vote. The 43rd president of America takes office under extraordinary circumstances and must face equally extraordinary challenges.

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." Bush must act on this promise, and one way is to appoint a Democrat to the cabinet, a move that might annoy the right wing in his party, but would convince his critics especially in the Democrat camp, that he means to be a centrist. In his choice of vice president-elect Dick Cheney and the appointment on Sunday of secretary of state Colin Powell, Bush has shown a predictable reliance on staunch Republicans, who happen to be his father's trusted advisors. This is another challenge that Bush Junior must overcome: he must become a person in his own right, not the son of George Bush Senior.

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. Clinton and Gore made a formidable international team, one that Bush will be hard put to match. Early in the campaign, Bush came in for ridicule because of his singular lack of exposure to international affairs. He has responded y promising to depend on the advice of a team of the most astute foreign policy experts, a promise he has redeemed by choosing Colin Powell to lead foreign policy. But Bush must ensure that Powell reinforces and builds upon the good work done by Bill Clinton. particularly in sustaining, against the greatest odds. the peace process in the Middle East, and in bringing rapprochement and détente between former combatants around the world. Bush must guard against becoming isolationist and in believing that protecting American interests alone is the key to maintaining international peace. Bill Clinton's special interest in South Asia brought about signs of real peace in this region, especially after both India and Pakistan became nuclear states. We urge George Bush to recognise the vast potential of South Asia as a repository of natural and human resources, and to not only reinforce but build further on ties with America in future.

Barak's Resignation: Future of Peace Process Uncertain

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 ... And in such an eventuality, Barak may find good support from the Palestinians and also from the Israelis, which may ensure his election victory.

succeeded in throwing L 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. Barak is leaving office two years before the expiry of his term of four years. Obviously his resignation appears a serious political gamble. His political rating has been slipping away for the last two months since the violence of Israeli public peace and secustarted. The public opinion as per rity is more important than the latest poll has shown him even mental satisfaction of having below Ariel Sharon. This is nothsovereignty over East Jerusalem. ing but a disaster for Barak. With Benjamin Netanyahu his poll Instead of choosing such a path Barak went ahead with a rating is down by a large margin. Thus Barak's position is precari-

RIEL Sharon has finally

ous in terms of Israeli politics. 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. There was a chance that the Palestinians would have gone for even a partial peace deal if East Jerusalem issue could be negotiated with real flexibility. In other words, Barak could gamble thereby agreeing to comply with UN resolutions and returning East Jerusome agreed adjustments in the form of retaining some settlements in the neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. This possibility could have been explored with enough security guarantees All these put Barak completely which is the major concern for downhill in terms of his handling the Israeli public. Barak had a fairly good chance to get the tic politics. public approval provided the deal was good enough in terms of peace and security for the Israeli public. It seems that for majority

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. He started the process well and made some good progress but changed course due to domestic political reasons for which last Camp David failed. Then serious violence erupted with Sharon's politically calculated visit to the Holy sites. Instead of dealing with it calmly with some communications and understanding with Arafat, salem to the Palestinians with Barak dealt with the Palestinians in a heavy handed manner and several hundred lives were lost. The result was a bizarre situation which led to international and particularly UN condemnation.

of the situation as well as domes-

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



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. As Netanyahu is not a Knesset member due to his resignation in 1998 after his defeat in Prime Ministerial election, he was not expected to be in the race. Only rival could be Arial Sharon whom Barak thought he would defeat easily. Though under the present political situation no Israeli would bet on Barak's victory, he stands a chance on something like negative voting.

Everybody knows that it is Ariel

nated by Labour party for contesting Prime Ministerial election. Netanyahu has already declared publicly that he would like to be the next Prime Minister of Israel. Indeed, he has 20 per cent lead over Barak in the latest opinion poll. This is politics. Netanyahu left Israeli politics after his last defeat and nobody was even thinking of his return to Israeli politics and certainly not so soon. Now the world has to wait and see how Barak's gamble

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. As mentioned above, it is highly likely that Israeli Knesset would decide to dissolve itself giving Netanyahu and others the opportunity to fight this unexpected Prime Ministerial election. And under the present political situation Netanyahu stands a good chance to return. 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. For that he has to cooperate with George Mitchell's Fact Finding Commission, which has undertaken its work already, and provide facts that would prove beyond doubts the responsibility of Sharon and his party for the present violence. (The Commission has already interviewed Barak and Arafat. The details are not known.) If this becomes the conclusion of the Commission,

then Barak could effectively use the same in his election campaign for turning the table around. Here Barak may find some

support from Palestinians which he needs any way if he has to achieve the other objective the negotiations for a peace deal. However, Barak has to keep in view his own dismal record too and amend the same if he expects any success in the peace front. He fell into Sharon's trap and badly handled the Palestinian uprising. During his two years in office more settlements were built in the occupied territories than in Netanyahu's full term of four years. However, considering other issues and the general attitude towards peace, Barak still seems to be the best bet for the Palestinians. With boyish look Barak appears less arrogant than Netanyahu. Netanyahu's arrogance is not only in face, he also behaves arrogantly and particularly so in dealing with the Palestinians.In his latest statements he 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 with transfer of East Jerusalem with the holy sites to the Palestinians with sufficient security guarantees to the Israeli public. And in such an eventuality. Barak may find good support from the Palestinians and also from the Israelis, which may ensure his election victory.

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.

EPUBLICAN George W.Bush has been elected the 43rd president of the United States of America the old and strong democracy which is currently the only super power in the world. The president-elect has got down to business like crafting his cabinet within 24 hours of being officially declared as the new president of the country after a total uncertainty for 36 days since the November 7 elections which threw no winner but only unexpected confusion and unbelievably long wait for the successful candidate. Soon after the elections, George W.Bush was declared president by some media but they backtracked since the scenario in Florida, a key state which was to choose 25 electoral college (EC) votes on the basis of win of the popular votes, was unclear. What followed then was never thought of as two hopefuls Bush and Democract Al-Gore moved to first in the Florida supreme court and then in the federal supreme court to get court ruling in their favour. The controversy surrounding the hand counting of the votes in some counties in Florida is now a matter of past but this has delayed the declaration of the winner by 36 days.

At one stage, it appeared as if Al-Gore was the new president since he had already won more popular as well as EC votes than Bush as either men needed at least 270 EC votes to win the presidency. Whoever won the Florida popular votes, was to secure all the 25 EC votes from the state and become chief executive of the nation. Finally, Bush won all the 25 EC votes by virtue of winning of popular votes in Florida by a slender difference and his case was cleared by the federal supreme court in a momentous verdict of 5-4 margin involving the recounting and hand counting of the votes in some counties in Florida. Bush is the new president of the USA and his is the only second case in the American history when both father and son adorned the

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 What impact the new presi-

dent will make in the world since

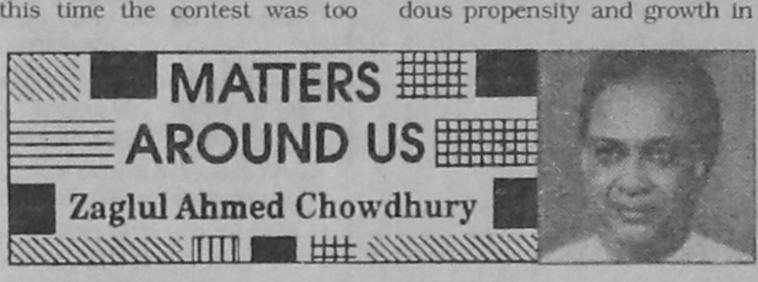
it will be a departure from the administration and political party which ruled the country for last eight years ? Had Al-Gore won the electoral battle, there would have been a change of person in the White House but not much in policy because the same Democrat party and much of the policies of the Clinton administration of which Al-Gore was the second important man would have continued. But now it will be a different story in many ways. Even during the days of former communist giant Soviet Union, the United States used to be considered as the "number one" power in world by many although both Washington and Moscow used to be seen as superpowers almost at par. Certainly, former Soviet Union was a power to reckon with and much of American foreign and defence policies in those days revolved around the "Soviet factor". Gone are those days and the United States now gleefully sees itself as the only superpower as the Soviet Union collapsed giving birth to several independent states, and the present Russian federation although comprises much of its geographical area but with a change in the pattern of governance. It is now a multi-party democracy instead of the oneparty communist rule and hence politically it is no longer in loggerheads with the United States since the latter considered communist nation a foe but not the

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. The elections were most keenly contested since the Kennedy-Nixon battle in 1960. But this time the contest was too

such votes to win the elections. The electoral vote in each state are allocated on a winner-takeall basis and as such a candidate who wins the popular votes in a state also wins all the electoral votes in that state. Bush won all the 25 EC votes in Florida and in the process just managed to scrape through the required 270 EC votes while Gore, little short of that target, missed all the 25 EC votes as he lost the popular votes in Florida although by a very small margin.

Al-Gore and George Bush differed considerably on domes tic 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 tremen-



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 a 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. In addition, the District of Columbia has three votes and this makes the grand total 538 and a candidate needs 270 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

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. Al-Gore wanted to engage US in constructive approach to China and Russia while Bush is little different supporting closer ties with Taiwan and also against placing American forces under the United Nations programmes. Gore is keen to pay the payments due to the UN as US contributions but Bush favours the payment only after necessary reorganisation and re-structuring the world body. In South Asia, all eagerly looked forward to the American elections like many others elsewhere in the world. However, interest here is more than in many other countries since the United States often figures in discussions and foreign policy parameters of the countries in the region. It is in a way more so because of the visit of president Clinton to South Asia early this year. Incidentally, that was the first ever visit to Bangladesh by an American president. Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina paid a return visit to his country just before the US elections. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and others in the region have also taken great interest in the elections.

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. However, there cannot be much difference since there is not much scope for that in the stateto-state relations. Vice-president elect Dick Cheney is known to be associated with American oil companies and was also here in this connection. It is possible that new administration will take greater interest in that field in ties with Bangladesh. Bush

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. Washington has, on the other hand, categorised the region as the most serious international flash point because of Indo-Pak enmity and their being nuclear powers. The US, no doubt gives some degree of significance to South Asia. The change in administration in the country will result in changes in different areas. Bush administration is expected to continue the importance that Washington is attaching to this region but there may be difference in perception of priorities.

South Asian nations like other have felicitated the presidentelect expressing hope that his tenure would see strengthening of the bilateral ties with their respective countries. Other major nations in the Asian region have also done the same but some of them by this time have given vent to their feelings on certain issues. For instance, China has congratulated Bush but said his hardline policy as regard to Taiwan issue may affect the bilateral ties and urged the new administration is Washington not to cause friction over

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?

projected a major boost for her defence force by announcing an injection of extra 23.5 billion dollars over 10 years into its coffers and setting a major regional and global role for it. The announcement comes with the release of a white paper on defence which already received a thumb up from the United States who argues that Australia should have a military force capable of operating "forward" independently or with allies: Countries like the United States and Australia currently secure in the homeland, should have armed forces able to engage and operate forward, not just remain in their backyard. This hints to the fact that Australia is now prepared to ditch the old doctrine of "Fortress Australia" in favour of "forward defence", a shift, one would reckon, sure to prune a military giant out of this sleeping continent. It will also mean that one should now get used to the idea of defending and policing the region on its own rather than relying on someone like America. The plan, if accepted by the country's parliament, will prove a windfall for the American companies, tipped

to receive the lion's share of the

USTRALIA has recently

areas and cities in Australia where people see military bases tion is discarded. 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

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

contracts. It will also be hailed in own defence where any notion of extending the horizon of interven-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. Having taken a series of battering in a number of countries, such as Somalia, Americans now want to forget the humiliating image people saw at home on the TV screen, as the spectre of Vietnam returned and

gripped the whole nation once

attained by localising the role. and leasing regions, deemed to be strategically important, to countries, whom United States can

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

again. In a bid to coin a new strat- the last bastion of communism in egy. it is for America imperative to the Balkan is now only a galaxy of see others shoulder and share tiny and depleted states, no more some of the roles that once fell potent to raise an ideological, let solely on her. This could be alone a military storm that could have buffeted America's interest in Europe. The vital oil pipelines are also secure with the untameable 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 confidante Pakistan, who stands at the vintage point of being able to simultaneously control the Taliban as well as putting Iran on check.

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 What is most contentious in could well extent 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.