

Follow-up on election expenses

Violators of law shouldn't escape legal action

THE law requires that election contenders submit their statements of poll-related expenditure within 15 days of the gazette notification of official results declared by the Election Commission. Poll results in all but two constituencies were officially gazetted by October 9. And by early November the entire gazette notification process was completed.

This is December 11. Yet it is learnt from the Election Commission, the designated authority to receive such expenditure returns, that some 50 poll contestants have failed to submit their statements. That most of them lost their security deposits having been beaten hands down give no cause for leniency. For they incurred election expenses all the same, and by doing so, were legally bound to submit their returns by the due date. Evidently, they have not done it. Therefore, they are liable for legal action. And, we are glad the EC is thinking along such line. But we don't know the fate of legal steps taken against 133 candidates for 1996 elections who had breached the law.

It is also our understanding that a good number of candidates failed to strictly adhere to the 15-day deadline 'managing' to delay their submission. We sense a certain diffidence in filling election expenditure returns, a certain lack of seriousness about it. The slack has been basically the upshot of our failure to bring the violators to justice.

Yet all of these infractions seem to pale into insignificance before a general realisation, shared by some EC officials as well, that most of the candidates may have understated their electoral expenses just to show they have kept within the Tk five lakh expenditure ceiling. Their real expenses must have overshoot it by miles. It is quite possible that heavyweight campaigners may have spent anything between Tk two and five crore.

Whether we raise the ceiling from Tk three lakh to five lakh or even more won't make any difference unless the EC has a mechanism to determine the veracity of the statements. The critically important thing is to deal with the expenditure as it escalates at the field level with sufficient proofs in evidence and freeze it on its tracks. That will be the best guarantee against bugging votes.

There was a new stipulation this time though, that poll contenders specify a bank account from which they would be drawing money to meet election expenses. Not only that, they were also required to submit bank statements duly inclusive of the election expenses incurred. Whether this rule has been followed or not will have to be thoroughly gone into together with other infractions of the law pertaining to electoral expenses. This better be a priority agenda with the EC.

Problem is urban governance

Dengue defies prognosis to stay around and kill

DEFEATING all predictions and prognosis, dengue has not only survived the end of the rainy season but continued to harass and kill citizens well into December. The dengue epidemic has not only defeated the not-so-effective attention of the health management authorities but epidemiologists as well. It was said that we would see the back of dengue by end-October as we did last year but this year it has remained active well into our winter.

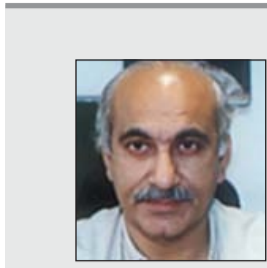
The reasons are obvious. The conventional breeding grounds of dengue have expanded and it isn't only the small containers of fresh water inside the house that are dangerous, experts say. It appears that the water tanks for soaking bricks and other activities at under-construction sites have become a major breeding and nesting source of dengue mosquitoes. And since Dhaka is in a state of perpetual building spree, there is no shortage of such dengue supply depots. The pests seem to have certainly identified a weak-spot in the city's life support system. Given this new vulnerability, battling this malady has become more challenging than before.

Dhaka's house owners aren't really keen to play by the rules. Those who refuse to construct safe houses by abiding by the building code can still be expected to make sure that their temporary water tanks are mosquito-free. Let's also suggest to them that spraying kerosene will kill the breeders or discourage egg-laying. The civic bodies need to vigorously campaign for ensuring legal, civilized and safe living by maintaining minimum standards.

We can't just let the matter lie where they are threatening to become a life-ending risk almost round the year. The only thing to do is to introduce codes of conduct for house-owners and builders. It should be accompanied by public motivation campaigns.

Since most legal bindings or regulations actually contribute more to corruption than reaching the objective, we suggest that the focus should be on a list of indicators for the elected officials to comply with. If they fail, they should be barred from contesting again. As of now, power only lies with the electorate on certain days only. If the right to be an elected public representative is linked to performance, the politicians can be made accountable and the public feel in charge. That is the only way to ensure a cycle of performance which will help resolve not just the dengue danger but many other neglected issues of governance.

A 'proflict' in America



M.J. AKBAR

WHAT changed on 11 September 2001? The answer has become even more crucial with the success of American arms in the war against the Taliban; a war that began amid much apprehension about American ability and even more cynicism about American will.

For Americans the world changed on 11 September. For the rest of the world, America changed on 11 September. The difference in perception is not ornamental. It might be legitimate to argue that when America changes the world changes as well. It is the privilege of any superpower to define the prevailing morality of those regions it commands, and there is little doubt that no nation in history has been as powerful as the United States is today. The whole world may not be equally obedient to Washington, but if you want to see the image in terms of a queue, then there is a clamour in the front to fawn, and only a thin fog end of sceptics at the back. No responsible government has discovered either the will or the justification to challenge American policy on war, peace and economics with any seriousness. Of course the two could be related; you discover the will only if you first find sufficient justification.

How did the world change for America? That is easy. It came indoors. America has always seen itself as the largest island on the globe, a golden glade of internal prosperity and external trade, ever

reluctant to engage in the messy conflicts of others, except as agent provocateur, or to defend its economic interests in vital areas that provide the raw material for its consumption and energy needs. In part this must be because of its history as a refugee island: it is a country that has been settled by refugee-invaders who escaped the sharper, America's attitude to conflict resolution used to be words. It did not have more than words for

a simple fact, that this continental island is no longer a safe haven, and this has changed every equation in its book dramatically.

How did America change for the world? In various ways. Some countries, India among them, had the private satisfaction of watching America wake up to a problem that it had only paid lip service to. But terrorism is a symptom of something sharper. America's attitude to conflict resolution used to be words. It did not have more than words for

Kandahar was no more than a mopping-up operation after that.

This in turn brings us to a critical point: you cannot intimidate those who are ready to die. If the United States wants to end terrorism, then it must work to change the ethos that persuades young men and women that there is a cause strong enough to die for. The immediate reaction of the White House was anger, and when anger is in the air the vane shifts almost automatically to Yasser Arafat. This is temporary

the help of some Muslim countries for its own needs? There is obviously going to be overlap, but the world is waiting to see how the balance tilts when interests are weighed against convictions. There have been hints that Washington has recognised the need for a viable Palestinian state, rather than a Palestine that is full of holes and moles.

Washington faces an unfamiliar twist, which is a price, perhaps welcome, of its single-superpower

Force over Delhi and Srinagar, then he is clearly dining at Barmecide's feast.

This is the danger with too much friendship. Everyone may end up praising food that does not exist. Barmecide, a great noble of the Caliph Haroun al-Rashid, at least until his head was cut off, would invite beggars from the street, seat them on the most comfortable divans and then order his servants to bring out a dinner of many courses. With each course, and each sherbet he would strew the air with phrases of praise for the food and drink, and, if his guests were sensible, they would join in with even greater compliments about the food, the chef, the service, the grandeur. The trick was that no food was ever served, and everyone participated in maintaining the illusion, both the well-fed host and starving beggar. A Barmecide's feast is an excellent metaphor, but not a good policy for international relations. Sometimes, though, the temptation to use the metaphor becomes irresistible for superpowers.

Far better for Washington to serve wholesome rice and dal with the rider that this is a realistic option, and good for health. Guests at such a table might be unhappy at the difference between reality and expectations, but at least their children will bless them for not returning hungry, and angry, and having dined on empty words.

Should there be a new word in the post-Taliban era? Conflict is too redolent of the past that we want to leave behind us. How about 'proflict'? It sounds like the opposite of conflict. Better still, it means nothing. As yet.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age

BYLINE
After Afghanistan, all conflicts, even the most vicious ones, are between friends of America. In the good old days, up to the age of Ronald Reagan, there were good guys and bad guys. All you can say now is that there are good guys and bad guys. Palestine is as happy with American mediation in its conflict with Israel as Israel is. India and Pakistan are now competitive about which of them is closer to George Bush ... Should there be a new word in the post-Taliban era? Conflict is too redolent of the past that we want to leave behind us. How about 'proflict'? It sounds like the opposite of conflict. Better still, it means nothing. As yet.

colonisation. Americans had escaped from a terrible world of bloodshed in Europe and Asia, and they were reluctant to bring home body bags in the first and second world wars as well. Their first major, independent, armed excursion in world affairs, Vietnam, taught them that their previous reluctance had been wise. Insular by preference, democratic by conviction, and gregarious by nature, Americans have little appreciation of the pools of anger created by their policies and their status as the preeminent power of the era. Were Graham Greene to mention an ugly American today, he would certainly be interrogated by George Bush's thought police; and much of the interrogation would be by officers who felt genuinely puzzled and hurt by this allegation. The Atlantic has often been referred to, in typical British understatement, as a pond. Terrorists targeting America did convert the Atlantic into a pond on September 11. America has to face

Afghanistan after it won its proxy war against the Soviet Union and disappeared, leaving Pakistan holding the baby and various militias crying uncle. Afghanistan is the first instance of a new phase of American participation in conflict resolution.

Is that good news? So much depends on the answer.

The suicide bombings that hit Israel last week prove one thing unambiguously: the American victory in Afghanistan has had no impact on the motivation of others who see no way forward in their cause other than suicide missions. The defeat of the Taliban (widely, and I believe sincerely, welcomed by most of the Muslim world) has not intimidated those Palestinians who believe Israel's occupation of their lands to be unjust and blame America for perpetrating this injustice. There was no doubt about the outcome in Afghanistan when those suicide missions wrecked havoc in Israel. Kabul had already fallen and

give and take, with much of the giving and taking being done on television screen. Which, by the way, is more incendiary? A gunfire war or a propaganda war? A frustrated Ehud Barak called Arafat a terrorist. Is he talking about the man he supped with just a year ago at Camp David in the benign presence of President Bill Clinton? Did Tony Blair have long meetings with a terrorist only a few weeks ago? Or did Arafat briefly retire from terrorism and has now returned to it after the Americans have delivered their sharpest message ever against the problem with their victory in Afghanistan? As one perceptive diplomat said, the world's leaders no longer feel accountable for the language they use.

Washington has to take a decision, and do so sooner rather than later: does it support the creation of a Palestine state because it believes that this is the correct thing to do, or did it make statements to this effect only because it wanted

status. After Afghanistan, all conflicts, even the most vicious ones, are between friends of America. In the good old days, up to the age of Ronald Reagan, there were good guys and bad guys. All you can say now is that there are good guys and bad guys. Palestine is as happy with American mediation in its conflict with Israel as Israel is. India and Pakistan are now competitive about which of them is closer to George Bush, a sort of my-bush-is-bigger-than-yours game. China takes as much comfort in visits from the American President as Taiwan. Is this the elixir for eternal life?

Regrettably, no. Their competition for the love of America does not make regional antagonists less hostile to each other. Washington's reluctance to intervene in the dispute over Kashmir is sensible; why should America purchase the distrust of one friend or the other over a dispute that it can do little about in any case. If anyone in Islamabad has visions of the American Air

Bangladesh is not on the list; Islam is

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED
writes from Princeton

ON November 9, the United States Department of State notified that it was slowing down the process of granting visas to young men from Arab and Muslim nations in an effort to deter terrorist attacks on America. The visa applications from 26 nations from any men between the ages of 16 and 46 will be checked against databases maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The security procedure will take up to 20 days and the applicants will be required to complete a detailed questionnaire on their backgrounds, including questions about any military service or weapons training, previous travel, and whether they had ever lost a passport. The Secretary of State Colin L. Powell termed the rules temporary.

The 26 nations affected by the new visa restrictions are: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Notice that Bangladesh is not on the list. Clearly, the list was compiled with thorough consultation with American Embassies all over the world. The fact that Bangladesh is not on the list must bear testimony to the favourable opinion of Bangladesh expressed by the American Ambassador and her staff in Bangladesh. We are grateful to Her Excellency U S Ambassador Mary Ann Peters for the honour.

Last month "India Abroad" published a list of countries whose nationals were to be forbidden to fly Chinese airlines heading for the US and Europe. All were Muslim majority nations, (except Israel), including, to "India Abroad's" delight, the nation that claims a "special relationship" to China, Pakistan. Once again Bangladesh was not on the list. One hopes such benign omissions are deserved.

Civil liberty groups in the US are up in arms regarding such racial,

religious and national profiling. And it can be argued that the Bush Administration, especially Attorney General John Ashcroft has gone too far in some areas. But let us not lose sight of the horrendous nature of the crime perpetrated on September 11. The worst form of terrorism until that date was a building blown up with about 300 dead. This was terrorism multiplied by over a hundred. Taking advantage of the liberal US visa policy the terrorists entered the US freely,

especially the women, rejoicing at the Taliban's ouster?

Islam continues to take a beating in America. Reverend Franklin Graham, the son and heir to the legendary evangelist Reverend Billy Graham called Islam "an evil and wicked" religion. Neither the senior Graham, nor Jerry Falwell nor Pat Robertson protested. There has been systematic attempt to separate the Christian and Jewish God from the Islamic God. Christian "God" is better, is the message they

1998? Pakistan's Islamic bomb is what the Israelis and Hindus want to destroy. As the above radio ad demonstrates, although the operation against the Taliban could not have taken place without Pakistan granting the US over flight rights and bases, there is a parallel, concerted effort in the Press to demonize Pakistan.

Just before Secretary of State Colin Powell was to make a policy statement on the Middle East on November 19, the number one

turned in by his brother in the 1990s. The Bin Ladens of the world do not finesse anyone to death, they inflict maximum casualty at every attempt. It is doubtful that they know who Senators Tom Daschle or Patrick Leahy are. Yet, while attorney general has rounded up over a thousand non-citizens and put them in jail with no charges against them, he has moved very slowly on bioterrorism, which has killed several Americans and cost the postal service billions of dollars. Frank

That was not the case for Lisa Beyer, who in *Time* magazine's December 3 issue claimed that, "nowhere in the Muslim world are women treated as equals." They are in the USA and the West? Four Muslim countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and Indonesia, have had women heads of the government; how many have the US had, Lisa?

The unkindest cut was delivered by Tom Friedman. In his November 27 column, Friedman argued that the Jews and Christians "have gone back to their sacred texts to reinterpret their traditions to embrace modernity and pluralism and create space for secularism and alternative faiths...What is different about Islam is that while there have been a few attempts at such a reformation (here Friedman peddles Rushdie's solutions), none have flowered or found the support of a Muslim state." Friedman's comments infuriated the Jews and Christian readers. If someone does not believe his religion is the true one, what business he has in following it, they asked. What Friedman suggests is the secularization of Islam. If Islam needed a reformation, or was anti-modern it would not have thrived unchanged for over 1400 years. My suggestion to Friedman is: "Read the holy Quran, Tom, you will find that among other gems it states clearly, "there is no compulsion in religion." Do not be duped by the apostate Salman Rushdie, Tom. Do not accept anti-Muslim garbage that is being spewed in the press as fact? If you must talk about Islam with a third party, talk to a respectable person like Professor Amartya Sen, not Salman Rushdie." There is one suggestion of Tom Friedman that Muslims must take to heart. They must learn how to build planes. The type that can defend their nation's air space. As Russia and China learned long time ago, unless a nation is able to defend its skies and land, others with mighty military might will violate it at will and destroy the Muslim nation's infrastructure.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The 26 nations affected by the new visa restrictions are: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen ... The fact that Bangladesh is not on the list must bear testimony to the favourable opinion of Bangladesh expressed by the American Ambassador and her staff in Bangladesh ... Last month "India Abroad" published a list of countries whose nationals were to be forbidden to fly Chinese airlines heading for the US and Europe. All were Muslim majority nations, (except Israel), including Pakistan. Once again Bangladesh was not on the list. One hopes such benign omissions are deserved.

overstayed illegally, trained how to fly airplanes in US flight schools, hijacked four planes, turned them into missiles with Americans inside them and destroyed two of America's cherished landmarks, murdering at least 4000 Americans, over 500 Muslims among them, including one who attended our mosque.

The writer has not met an American who supports everything America does at home or abroad. He has criticized American policies severely when he felt it was unfair. It is morally indefensible, however, for someone to take full advantage of living in America and then be totally against everything America does. If someone is fundamentally opposed to everything American, he or she should leave America and remain true to his or her beliefs. And America too has the right to take note of the hostility of such persons and bar him or her from entering the country. And would the people who are so heartbroken at the Taliban's defeat have liked to live under them? Aren't the Afghan people,

espouse. The New York Time's Tom Friedman has listened to Salman Rushdie and has begun to refer to militant Muslims as "Islamists," to remind everyone in the West of their previous enemy, the Communists. Friedman ridiculed the terrorist for knowing how to crash a plane, not knowing how to build one.

In the aftermath of September 11, the most hateful letters against Islam and the Muslims have been published by Hindu Americans. ("I am sick and tired of hearing how great Islam is...all Muslims should be sent back to their country of origin.") The Jews are more subtle. In a New York radio commercial wishing everyone holiday cheer, the head of a Jewish organization reminds everyone: "Do you know that in Saudi Arabia children are taught not to take Christians and Jews as friends? In Pakistan children are taught to hate America!" The one country that the Jews and the Hindus would like to destroy is Pakistan. Remember Mr. Advani's threat to Pakistan before Pakistan exploded its own nuclear device in

Zionist lobbying group in the US, American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) presented the White House with a petition signed by eighty nine Senators, led by the Zionist Senator from Pennsylvania, Arlen Specter, warning the Administration not to ask Israel not to retaliate against the Palestinians, and praising President Bush for not meeting with Arafat. Shouldn't these Senators be looking after the interest of the United States rather than being a pawn in the foreign, Zionist propaganda machine?

As soon as anthrax bio-terrorism broke, experts suspected a "disgruntled American piggybacking on Islamic terrorism". The handwriting, with the dates written in the American way (month first), and all the addressees being either liberal television anchors or Democratic Senators, pointed towards a home-grown terrorist. Postal terrorism is the forte of Caucasian Americans. The Unabomber, Theodore Kazinsky killed and maimed several Americans over eighteen years through mail bombing before being

Rich of *The New York Times* observed on November 24: "A cynic might think that domestic extremists who share the attorney general's antipathy to abortion and gun control and are opposed to the likes of Mr. Leahy and Tom Daschle receive a free pass denied to suspicious-looking immigrants."

There have been a few sane voices. On November 23, in the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times*, Economics Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen warned the readers not to treat Islam as a fundamentalist monolithic religion. "Is true Islam the type propagated by Aurenzgeb (forcible conversions), or the type espoused by Akbar (respect for all faiths)?" he posed. Professor Sen also pointed out that language and culture proved stronger than Islam when Bangladesh separated from Pakistan in 1971. While prescribing democracy for the dictatorships that afflict the Islamic world, in one of his recent columns Tom Friedman heaped profuse praise on Bangladesh for its democracy and the two women leaders.

OPINION

Terrorism catalyzes global recession

A HUSNAIN

SCANNING the daily news brings up not virtual reality, but stark, unpleasant reality that this is the beginning of a sustained financial and economic recession in all the continents, North, South, East and West, and in the industrialised world, the third world, the LDCs and the DCs.

The bubbling signs were noticeable here and there during the preceding months, but after the black September terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon, the forces of gloom have taken control of the panicky minds of the super managers who control billions of dollars in transactions. The merger

fever is rising and the stock markets show signs of tremors (for example, the introduction of the super policing of the market changes in the UK).

The latest is the rumour about the impending collapse of the US giant Enron group dealing globally with the marketing of energy (watch what Unocal is up to in Bangladesh). The news from North and South Korea are still negative; Japan and Singapore are in deep trouble (add Malaysia now), while Europe is lingering too long with non-decisions, and EU delegates are flying over the developing regions, tapping for openings and options. Down under, Australia and New Zealand have no meaty news, it is all bones and carcass.

Rumblings of an economic

earthquake have already been detected from many capitals; and money and ingenuity cannot provide solutions, because the former is in short supply, and there is not enough to go round for keeping the system lubricated.

The US is in a predicament - start more wars to keep the factories running (after what happened to the airlines network). The idea is traditional Yankee style of solving problems, in spite of bitter experience of toying with different countries in the past. Uncle Sam is trying to come out of the North American continental perch (the two mighty oceans on both sides cannot protect the nation any longer), with flawed foreign policies decipherable to none. Prop and drop friends and

foes - Pakistan is the latest victim, as per media analysts. A few thousand Talibans have shaken up the world - what magical power (looking cynically)! The other day BBC was publicising 'exquisite' Afghani recipes, to emphasize nomadic culture and cuisine to the closed American mind (read Bloom).

It is rather ironic to note that what economic theories, democratic concepts, good politics and foreign aid could not achieve, one blast of super terrorism is set to narrow the gap between the two ends of the economic ladder. In the fight between the giant and the minnow, strange strategies seem to work - with a shock.

The world economy will never be

the same again. Foundations are cracking, and structures are tumbling with the vision for a brave new world for the underdogs. Anyway, no country is safe, industrialised or underdeveloped. The former need the latter's natural resources, and continue the refrain on the green-house effect in the third world (the US refused to sign the eco international agreement).

The East-West growth rates might take a tumble, and in some cases reverse. It is a merry-go-round of mixed soups served with the same ladle. Bangladesh was clothing the world, but now some naked truth might emerge, displaying new economic garbs in sheep's clothing.

In economics or military preparations, the basic instinct or motivation is self-survival, with incremental improvements, for self, society and the nation. Mostly it is at the expense of others. A pair crops up: the exploiters and the exploited. There may be harmony or disharmony. The ideal business climate involves the yin yang principle, or complementarity. In a human system, profit and gains come in, which have different garbs in democracy, capitalism, socialism, and other man-made theoretical perks.

The developing countries are always under the predatory grip of big multinational companies, who have the shadowed support or backing of their government. The

bargaining between the big and small (brother!) introduces distortions and disparities. The real purpose of creating the WTO is disturbing the Third World. The violent disturbances have now been noted by the industrialised nations. In areas of subjective gain, the weaker suffer (as Afghanistan is suffering due to the unilateral offensive by the superpower).

The only (moral) consolation is that every event is subject to cycles of change. A new cycle has been dramatically introduced since 11 September 2001, shaking up the existing equilibrium between the current civilizations (we and they). The constantly changing situations will encourage short-term focus on sticky issues and their transient

solutions. Smaller nations have little holding or bargaining power. Newly emerged nations are at a greater disadvantage, having to operate from a smaller foundation, with fewer options.

The winds of change have started affecting the big operators. The future does not look bright to them, and they cannot do without the raw materials from the untapped nations or regions (note the dwindling birth rates in the advanced countries and the break up of the families). The stance on WTO is certainly going to change after the black September catalyst.