

A reshuffle that fails to impress

The whys and hows of better performance badly missing

BAKLADESH under a re-incarnated BNP rule has tasted its first cabinet reshuffle but it's hardly understood what its purpose was. Shunting Moyeen Khan off to Science and Technology and replacing him at Information with Tariqul Islam can't guarantee a better press for the BNP, which has taken media flak for a less than laudable performance.

Basically one isn't sure whether the reshuffle was done for public or party consumption for it does not seem to have been done to increase efficiency. The ruling party appears to be reeling from inner party conflicts and it clearly signifies that trying to make everyone happy within the party has made many voters dissatisfied. The BNP needs to protect itself from political embarrassment of the kind manifested in the attack by its Alliance partner in the House on the issue of Gujarat violence.

But how this minor cabinet change will settle the cauldron is as yet unclear. The main problem - law and order - remains disastrous and shuffling the Home Minister away will hardly be a solution. As it is, enthusiasm for that job is low amongst other members we learn. And a new Minister will not be able to do more unless the government decides to pursue criminals rather than blame the Opposition.

It's also possible that the cabinet has actually become too unwieldy for appropriate performance and the PM may actually be stalled in her intentions to carry out her electoral mandate. Star has reported that senior colleagues have already suggested downsizing and had warned that large cabinets can strain the governmental shoulders.

Having gone past her 100-day mark and nearly into the sixth month, the BNP-led government has stepped into the arena of public dismay. As the crime rate surges and the authorities fail to check that, economy slumps and international trade looks scary, political tension continues to mount and the government continues on a revenge mode, the people will begin to be seriously unhappy. And if an unrest begins it will have to be more than a reshuffle to bring the official ship back on an even keel.

All have counselled that the government is served best by a cabinet that is sharp and alert but this cabinet isn't that. Reshuffling of the type we have just seen, will be a limited gain, if at all. If the BNP-led government realised that all it takes is a sense of purpose to serve the people first before listening to loyalist demands, it could easily reach a point where reshuffles would be redundant as a display of energetic governance.

ME still bleeds

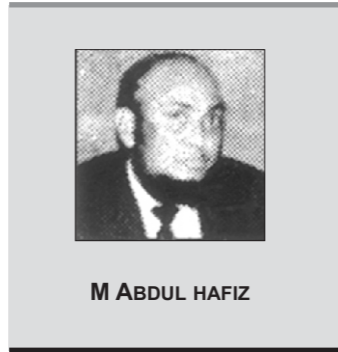
Direct US intervention crucial

WHILE fighting between the Palestinians and the Israelis continue to claim lives -- more than 1,500 people, mostly civilian, have died in 17 months since the *intifada* began -- the United States remains inexplicably and, to many, infuriatingly indifferent. The latest upsurge in bloody violence in the Middle East, marked by suicide bombings and Israeli raids on Palestinian installations, has induced the White House's concern and condemnation alright; however, effective US intervention remains a far cry. The Bush administration will send an envoy, Anthony Zinni, to the Middle East, and US Secretary of State Colin Powell has said he is prepared to send a small number of American monitors to supervise a truce deal between the Palestinians and the Israelis struck under US pressure. But, given the prevailing situation in the Palestinian territory, these might prove inadequate, if not inconsequential.

Encouragingly, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has said he is ready to ease travel restrictions on Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. While the Palestinians remain sceptical of Sharon's intentions, the hawkish prime minister's sudden change of heart is viewed as being induced by the American plan to send Zinni. Such influence can easily be used to defuse tension in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the Bush administration seems to have pushed the Middle East crisis down its list of priorities in its preoccupation with the war against terrorism. Media reports that the war could get into its second phase with attack on Iraq and the US is in consultation with the United Kingdom in this regard could complicate matters further.

The Bush administration will need full support of the Arab world, if it wants to take the war against terrorism any further. With violence raging in the Palestinian territory and Israeli army continuing its excesses, that support would be hard to come by. In the just-held meeting of Arab foreign ministers, it was observed that the Saudi initiative could be Israel's last chance for peace. The US should make sure that Sharon grabs the opportunity with both hands.

Extending the war on terror: Prudent or paranoid?



M ABDUL HAFIZ

RESIDENT George W. Bush who covered at the news of terrorists' attack on 11 September 2001, zig-zagged his way back to Washington and hid himself for hours in an airforce bunker in far-off Nebraska is now described as a 'redeemer', a man of 'gut instinct' and one having 'core belief', thanks to his great military victory in Afghanistan. It is a different matter that it brought in its wake pre-Taliban chaos and warlordism, cost 5000 plus Afghan civilian lives, made possible the resumption of booming heroin trade and provided the Russians chance for fresh inroad in their beaten ground in alliance with old Afghan communists. However, the President believes that the victory can be duplicated against other malefactors like Iraq, Iran and North Korea (it supplies missile components and technology to several Arab countries) who resist American will. In his bellicose State of the Union address on 29 January President Bush proclaimed in tune with Ronald Reagan's 'evil empire' the existence of an 'axis of evil' that threatened the US and the world. This simplistic reduction of complex foreign policy issue into comic book term and Bush's threat of more military action around the world has made good political staple within the US where war hysteria is stoked by the administration's hawks and all-too-accommodating US media.

George Bush in his State of the Union message to the Congress unveiled his future plan by giving ultimatum of sorts to the rogue states of Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

He claimed that these countries were engaged in developing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction and needed to be pre-empted in their attempts. A coordinated preemptive action against them is the unfinished agenda of US-led war on terrorism that made triumphant start in Afghanistan. Bush has vowed to chase the al-Qaeda fugitives to their supposed sanctuaries in about a dozen countries. Iraq and Iran being

neither could Saddam be dislodged. In Gulf war, 200,000 Iraqis were killed, the country's economy was crippled and the infrastructure destroyed. The Arab world's most developed, modern country was virtually pushed into middle age. The economic blockade imposed on Iraq in August 1990 still remains causing unprecedented human disaster in which, according to UN statistics, 500,000 Iraqi children

with the hope that it would eventually lead to the lifting of the sanction. But every time Iraq accepted and implemented the UNSCOM requirements, a new set of conditions and requirement would be imposed through another UNSC resolution. Fed up with the UN contrivance Saddam drove the inspection team out and repeatedly refused to readmit it. After having failed to rein in a defiant Saddam Hussain by implicating his country

George Bush's entry into Oval office marked a turn-around in US-Iran equation. Because Bush's perception of Iran conformed more to those of his father, Bush the senior. The new president still saw Iran, as it was seen by the US in the early years of revolution, 'a sponsor of terrorism', 'exporter of revolution', a threatening force in the region and an avowed enemy of the US. He obviously reversed the Clinton-era shift in Iran policy firmly back to the

Hussain's Iraq -- the unfinished agenda of first Bush presidency -- could face military action, have been received with alarms by European leaders. They have made it clear that they would not support such a widening of the war on terror. German deputy foreign minister bluntly told Washington, "The terror argument cannot be used to legitimate old enmities."

Calling Iraq, Iran and North Korea 'an axis of evil' has provoked a chorus of protest from Europe. Even the traditionally supportive Britain has spoken out against it. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw tried to explain Bush's speech in different light: preparatory to next November's Congressional election. French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine has been more forthright in his criticism of President Bush's game plan. "We are threatened today by a new simplism which consists in reducing everything to the war on terrorism. We cannot accept that idea. You have got to tackle the root causes, the situations, poverty, injustice," he said. Echoing Vedrine's comment Chris Patten, the EU Commissioner for International Affairs, accused Bush Administration of a dangerously "absolutist and simplistic" stance towards the rest of the world, stressing the need to tackle terrorism's root causes and objecting to America's 'unilateralist overdrive'.

It is rather too early to ascertain if President Bush really meant the threats he made in his State of the Union speech and on subsequent occasions. Haunted by the memory of US' humiliation during the hostage crisis of 1979 in Tehran and its repeated failure to be able to dislodge Saddam Hussain if it is the paranoia of Mr. Bush over why things shouldn't go the way the world's most powerful country would like them to, -- the damage can be limited. But it would be a total disaster if the President meant everything he said, as confirmed by Ms Condoleezza Rice, the President's National Security Adviser.

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PERSPECTIVES

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the most identified rogues with decade-old sanctions imposed on them will have to bear the brunt of the first blitz unless they comply with American demands. As far as Iraq is concerned it must re-admit the UN arms inspectors ousted by Baghdad two years ago or face the consequences.

Senator Josef Lieberman, a senior member of the Senate's Armed Services Committee on his recent return from a tour of Central Asia and Afghanistan set the tone for the frenzied anti-Iraq campaign. According to him "the unique threat to American security by Saddam Hussain's regime is so real, grave and imminent that even if no other nation were to stand with us, we must be prepared to act alone...." Lieberman's testimony may add fresh impetus to Bush's resolve but Washington's obsession with Iraqi threat is rather old and dates back to early nineties when it led 29-nation international coalition against Iraq not only to punish her for invading Kuwait but also to crush its military potentials once for all. During January-March 1991, 11,00,000 aerial sorties bombed Iraq to devastate the country. But it did not capitulate;

under five died till 1998. Five to six thousand children continue to die every month mostly due to malnutrition, non-availability of medicine and contaminated water. The wide scale use of depleted uranium during the war has resulted in birth deformities and cancer, Madellin Albright, the former US secretary of state, when told of the tragedy, sarcastically said that it was worth the price.

Ironically, it was the US which propped up Iraq as countervailing force against Iran after the latter's 1979 Islamic revolution. The US sent Iraq's Saddam Hussain to invade Iran and crush its Islamic government. She secretly supplied Iraq with money, arms, intelligence and chemical and biological weapons. The relations became sour when after the Iran-Iraq war Saddam's was gun pointed towards US' guaranteed allies in the Gulf and Iraq's million-strong military increasingly posed threat to Israel. Crippled by both the Gulf wars and a decade of closely monitored sanction Iraq accepted all the incursions, insults and violation of sovereignty by the weapon inspectors of the UNSCOM and its spies for years

either in Black September or the subsequent anthrax scare, the US now puts Iraq on the top of the hit list of its projected war on terrorism.

As regards Iran, notwithstanding the US' decade long containment policy, there had been subtle rise and fall in the relationship of the two countries. The fiery anti-US rhetoric of Khomeini era gradually gave way to visible pragmatism over the years. In a groundbreaking interview with the CNN in 1998 Iran's reformist President Khatami wanted to pull down the 'wall of mistrust' between his country and the US. In Washington too there was a growing realisation that the sanction against Iran was hurting the US' own economic interest and the seeds of moderation germinating in Iran needed to be encouraged. This resulted in a perceptible shift in US' Iran policy from containment to limited engagement. In 2000, one month after the election of a reformers dominated *Majlis*, Washington announced the easing of sanctions on some Iranian exports and offered 'open dialogue'. No further progress was made on this count due to impending presidential election in the United States.

containment. Yet Iran, instead of responding in the same coin, put aside its differences with the US and cooperated with her in the latter's war against terrorism. Viewed against this backdrop, George Bush's harsh criticism of Iran in his State of the Union speech came as a total surprise to Tehran. Particularly, Bush's lumping of Iran with Iraq and North Korea as an 'axis of evil' and implicitly threatening it with military action signalled the US' open hostility against Iran.

This has been a depressing reflection of the lack of sophistication in American foreign policy under President Bush whose black and white vision of the world allows no grey area; neither does it appreciate the complex context and factors that shape international relation. It also reflects the US' stern unilateralism which was shunned in the wake of 11 September. All that changed after the US' easy victory in Afghanistan. The US' bloated confidence has inevitably resulted in a cleavage between Washington and coalition partners with regard to the extended war on terror. The hints by various members of Bush Administration that Saddam

Gujarat under barbarism's spell: Modi must be sent packing

PRAFUL BIDWAI

writes from New Delhi

BARBARISM rules Gujarat. Words can't convey the bestial passions behind the burning alive and chopping up of people such as former MP Ehsan Jaffrey.

Pictures cannot describe the grief that citizens feel as they suffer unspeakable brutalities at the hands of *Hindutva* mobs.

And no camera has captured the agony of those whose life has been suddenly reduced to endless humiliation, insecurity and penalty.

Gujarat is witnessing a *full-scale anti-Muslim pogrom*. The official death toll has crossed 550. If the utterly condemnable Godhra incident involved preparation by extremist elements, the ensuing bloodbath could only have been the result of elaborate planning by fanatics *AND* state complicity.

Nothing else can explain how the VHP's goons could quickly swing into action with stockpiled firearms, swords and *trishuls*.

The Gujarat government's conduct has been brazenly partisan. Its police not only failed to stop the violence; it actively encouraged it. Just as in Bombay in 1992-93, it refused to protect Muslims, knowing this would result in their mass murder.

Worse, it itself participated in looting, arson, armed intimidation and murder. It takes more than mere apathy for the police to passively watch the stoning of the

Defence Minister's car.

Gujarat thus fits into a sordid pattern, witnessed right since Ahmedabad (1969) and Bhiwandi (1970) to Delhi (1984) and Bombay (1992-93). The pattern's first component is formation of false collectivities (Hindus and Muslims, erasing the distinctions between the

was planned and executed by a *political group* organically linked to the state. In Gujarat, the VHP merges seamlessly with the BJP and the government.

Chief Minister Modi has been the principal source of the pogrom. In Bombay, Mr Sudhakar Naik watched passively as Mr Bal

lence, while condoning the violence of casteism.

Mr Modi's is a fit case for hate-speech prosecution. His government recently took undemocratic steps such as ordering 'dharti mata' *vajinas* in state-run schools to "prevent" earthquakes, and compelling Adivasi children to carry the

"the duty of the Union to protect every State against ... internal disturbance" and ensure that its governance "is carried on in accordance with the ... Constitution."

The Centre in 1992 pleaded helplessness in dealing with the Ayodhya campaign, on the ground that an elected government existed

Gujarat is an exceptional situation of communalism eating into the state's vitals. This will undermine numerous institutions--police, political parties, impartiality of government --vis-à-vis ethnic-religious groups, and freedom of expression. These institutions must be energetically defended. So must ALL citizens. It is equally vital to prevent the Vajpayee government from cynically using Gujarat as an excuse for a dishonourable "compromise" on Ayodhya, by illegally transferring some of the 67-acre land and allowing bhoomi puja on March 15. That would violate the 1993 land takeover law. Worse, it would appease some of the worst enemies of Indian democracy.

tolerant majority and fanatical minority in each community). A second element is revenge. And the third is active collusion between Hindu communal groups and the police.

Numerous official inquiry commissions have documented such collusion. Take Justice Ranganath Misra on the 1984 riots: "The riots occurred broadly on account of the total passivity, callousness and indifference of the police" in protecting Sikhs.

Justice B.N. Srikrishna documented the Bombay police's sick attitude: "One Muslim killed [is] one Muslim less' ... [Police] officers ... appeared to have an in built bias against the Muslims."

What further distinguishes Gujarat is that the violence there

Thackeray directed the anti-Muslim violence. In Gujarat, Mr Modi himself gives out pro-violence signals. Witness: "I am fully satisfied with the performance of the police". (This, when the first day's death-toll crossed 150). Take his March 3 "Newton's Law" enunciation: "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction".

Mr Modi is a past master at violent politics. In 1985-86, he instigated a bloody anti-low caste agitation. In 1992, in Surat, he masterminded unspeakable atrocities against women. After September 11, he said all Muslims may not be terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.

A life-long RSS *pracharak*, Mr Modi has never hidden his hatred of Islam which he equates with vio-

Gita as a sign of loyalty to a religion they don't practise, being nature-worshippers.

For Gujarat's religious minorities, Mr Modi's rule is no different from what Mr Slobodan Milosevic's reign was for Serbia's ethnic minorities. Both meant mass murder. Each day of Mr Modi's continuation in office means more violence.

Mr Modi must be sacked. His rule is incompatible with fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. This is not a party-political, but a civil society, demand. Gujarat faces the kind of emergency for which Articles 355 and 356 were envisaged. These empower the Centre to dismiss a state government or deploy troops to enforce Central orders. Article 355 specifically says it is

in Lucknow. This dishonest plea must not be repeated today.

Mr Modi's dismissal has become more urgent with reports that 40,000 Muslim refugees are being treated like concentration-camp prisoners. His government and VHP are even blocking food supplies to them.

Mr Modi is shamelessly discriminatory in awarding Rs 2 lakhs as compensation for the Godhra dead, and only half the amount for others--if they are given anything at all.

Putting Gujarat under President's rule won't be enough. The Army must take over law-and-order. We also need assurance that Gujarat will not be further communalised under Home Minister Advani's tender mercies. This can happen if there is an all-

party committee to monitor and advise the state administration. Alternatively, the Supreme Court must direct Mr Vajpayee to restore normalcy and bring the guilty to book.

The first is unlikely, given the BJP's track record. The second is eminently worth trying. These are not "normal" or "standard" solutions. The President is not the court of last resort. Nor is the Supreme Court meant to advise on administrative matters. Nonetheless, in exceptional circumstances, such institutions can play slightly larger roles.

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Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

Remembering Shahed Latif My father lives

SCHEREZAD J. MONAMI LATIF

MY Baba died on a Tuesday and the Years 2000 and 2001 were the worst years of my life. It is now March 2002 and exactly a year from today my father died somewhere between 3 and 4 in the morning, in Red Crescent Hospital, in a VIP room that is a step away from the nursery where my brother was born 32 years ago when it was called Holy Family Hospital. They say that only two things in life are for certain, birth and death. I did not witness my birth or anyone else's for that matter; but death I have witnessed and my life will never be the same because of it.

I have cried in so many places that make up my life in New York city, at the movies where one word in an advertisement reminded me of a time when my father was sick; at the supermarket where a father told his little girl he loved her in the cereal aisle; on the subway just because I couldn't help myself, in my school's toilet, in the library. I find I cannot stop myself from crying and still there is an ocean of unshed tears inside of me.

I miss my mother. I don't remember missing her so much before. I've only got one of my parents left, the thought keeps reoccurring in my head at the oddest of times. She and I cannot identify with each other's pain. Hers is a pain that I may never be able to fathom and mine, well my pain has been felt by countless daughters who have lost the most loving and loved figure in their

lives. It has been a year and I find myself asking the same question I asked the week I lost my Baba. How does one get over the loss of a parent? One doesn't. I am, a year later, testament to that fact.



I don't like visiting my father's grave. It gives me little peace. I don't think he lives there, I have told my mother a thousand times. He doesn't live there. He lives in me, in our house in Eskaton Garden Road, he lives every time I am reminded by someone that I have my Baba's face; every time I look into the faces of my father's two siblings, so alike yet not him. He lives every time I

think of him which is all the time really and he lives just by virtue of the fact that I live and my brother lives. A year later I still grieve, I still cry and I think of my father all the time, every day. That is what I can do still to keep my father alive. To remember. To remember him telling me I could win the Pulitzer just because I'd been able to crank out a 1,000 worded short story at age 15; or the way he smiled at me and winked behind my mother's disapproving back whenever I'd come home past my curfew; or how he'd wait for my stories every day when he came home from work, first stories of school and later stories of my experiences at work. To remember him during the last years, when I'd come home from a party and would be greeted with the same question the next morning: "Did you meet any nice boys ma?" And when he was sick how he'd apologize over and over for not being able to do things on his own, for needing me to massage his legs, help him to bed, fetch him a glass of water. I love you so much ma, thank you, thank you, he'd say, each time I did any little thing for him. I remember everything my father said and did. That is I think I do. I fear that I don't remember enough or often enough. But those are fears that anyone who has been where I am would know of. I fear the day I don't remember so much or as often. Will there ever be that day? That is what I strive to hold together, the constancy of my remembering my father. Because as long as I remember, he lives.

OPINION

Victimizing the victims: Is media responsible?

SYED ASHFAQ QADRI

VIOLENCE in our country is not new. Violence against individuals is an everyday occurrence. Even though it is undesirable that such a high level of crime is prevalent in our society, the public has a right to be informed about what is going on around them. The media has a responsibility to bring such actions to the notice of civil society. The news media can report these crimes in any manner it chooses. Freedom of expression enables the press not only to decide what to report, but also how to present it. When newspapers choose to report crimes, they exercise the freedom of expression. When newspapers print photographs of the victims and their families at their moment of absolute dejection, they exercise the freedom of expression, but they also abuse it.

The photographs that accompany news reports of murder are usually graphic in nature. They display the dead and mutilated bodies of victims, and they are complemented by photographs of family members in a state of absolute anguish. Printing these photographs is unnecessary and distasteful. The act of printing these photos may not be illegal, but it is immoral. It demonstrates insensitivity to the plight of the

victims and their family members. It demonstrates a lack of respect for individual rights and freedoms. It serves to highlight the victims of the crimes and shifts emphasis from the criminal action. Being on the front page of newspapers forces the family members to have to re-experience their trauma.

One may question the motives of the news media behind printing such photographs. If the reason is to create sympathy for the victim and raise the awareness of the public, then the news media has the best of intentions but the worst of methods. If, however, the motive is to simply sensationalize the crime and to create some extra revenue, then that act is a breach of journalistic ethics.

If the reason is indeed to create awareness, they can do a better job by initially refraining from printing the victim's photograph, but using follow-up articles to personalize the victim's tragedy. Describing the victim from the point of view of those who had been in contact with him/her is surely a better method of personalizing the crime and creating public indignation at the tragedy. The news media can run a campaign to ensure that a thorough investigation is carried out to determine the cause of the tragedy, and to ensure that the relevant authorities make every

possible effort to hunt down the perpetrators of the crime.

This write-up is not meant to be a criticism of the news media in our country. It is an appeal. The news media remains one of the few truly democratic institutions in our country, and in the absence of an effectively functioning Parliament, it has tremendous responsibilities. Those responsibilities include bringing to public notice issues of national importance; those responsibilities involve analyzing the acts of individuals in public office, and those responsibilities involve ensuring that the freedom of expression is not misused. Printing photographs of victims and their families is an abuse of that freedom, and it must be stopped.

Stopping this act involves a realization that victims have rights, and that the press has an obligation to help defend those rights. The news media can adopt a policy not to print photographs to do so whenever it pleases. It can choose to recognize and defend victims' rights. Ultimately, the news media, like other democratic institutions, exists in order to protect the rights of individuals in society

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