DHAKA TUESDAY APRIL 2, 2002 Municipal polls

The EC should have acted to weed out criminals from the race

HE stage seems set for elections to Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna city corporations on April 25. The deadline for withdrawal of candidature over, lists of finalists as authenticated by the Election Commission are available. And with symbols allocated to them on individual, non-party basis, the election campaign has commenced with effect from yesterday, but evidently not with the gusto we had seen in earlier local government elections.

Enthusiasm and fervour should have been the byewords for these municipal polls, though. For one thing, these are being held close to three years after their due date; and for the other, each ward will have three women commissioners for the first time, like at the union parishad tier. Overall, higher stakes should have obliged the political parties to participate in these polls. Unfortunately, the opposition AL having boycotted the polls, these are going to be a rather lackadaisical affair topped off by a reduced representative character and, therefore, with a chink in their credibility. Understandably though, some one hundred AL sympathisers are going to contest as ward commissioners but with an 'independent' label on them. This is a speck of participation with the mayoral positions left out and several hundreds being in the ward commissioners fray from the four-party alliance

We have a premonition about the upcoming event which we would like to share with the government and the EC so that the polls can pass off without any untoward incidents. Moreover, there is also a question of ethical elections involved here. We hear the lists of final contestants include familiar names among the local 'terrorist' community. Not only are voters apprehensive of law and order breaches because of the alleged terrorist presence in the fray, they also seemingly have a genuine concern over who might end up being their elected local government leaders.

Sadek Hossain Khoka, the BNP alliance mayoral candidate for Dhaka says that since the AL put the names of BNP activists on their list of terrorists it would be wrong to dub some of the candidates as 'wanted terrorists'. This a sweeping argument that opens the hatch for all criminals with police records to try and launder themselves through an electoral process on the sly. The basic question is whether the Election Commission applied any criteria for straining out the black sheep from

The polls may not be violence-free just because the participation is one-sided. Although on behalf of the ruling alliance in Dhaka common candidates have been put up, in Khulna two BNP groups have come up with separate lists of nominees. The picture is not different for Rajshahi either. Overall, the government needs to be wary of an element of friction underlying the election

Canadian commitments

Some positive signs in investment horizon at last

HE prospect for donor assistance to salvage the country's sagging economy has become rather grim, so says Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman. Upon his return from the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting in Paris and the UNsponsored Millennium Summit on Financing for Development in Mexico, Mr Rahman has told the media that development assistance from the donors would be hard to come by. Our development partners have linked further assistance with different governance issues, the minister said while exchanging views with the Economic Reporters' Forum in the city yesterday. Against such a grim backdrop, the broad-based agreement with Canada to increase the volume of bilateral trade and investment does come as a sort of relief.

The Canadian government has expressed keen interest to invest in telecommunications, information technology and gas-based sectors. More importantly, visiting Canadian Secretary of State David Kilgour informed during Sunday's official talks that their International Trade Committee would recommend to the Canadian parliament elimination of tariff and quota restrictions on everything except agricultural products from the LDCs by the end of April. In that case, our garment export to Canada, which has an annual growth of six per cent, would have a further boost with a positive impact on overall export scenario.

The agreement with the Canadian government does open up a much-needed opportunity to bolster the country's information technology, telecommunication and gas-based sectors, and to expand our export basket. However, the government should not take the Canadian commitment for granted. In a general way, the conditions set forth by our development partners at the BDF meeting and later at the Millennium Summit for further assistance hold good. Canadian investors would only put in their money when we will have convinced them that we have the ground ready for investment in the jointly identified sectors. Given Canada's friendliness towards Bangladesh, we are hoping for the best.

"Don't worry, peace always wins" As Palestine burns



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

OW many of us would know that one of the countries that came forward to support the Bangladesh liberation war n 1971 was Israel? There were two initiatives of this sort and both involved the Leftists in the Mujibnagar government who had London connections. From the Israeli side, a major contact was the wife of the globally renowned violinist Yehudi Menhuhin. She was part of a cultural outfit that fronted support of various kinds including arms to various causes.

"When the matter was brought before the notice of the Bangladesh PM he declined to go ahead. His argument was, Bangladesh would one day become free and it would need to have contacts with the Arab world. And that's why despite the unlimited offer it wasn't taken up."

"But why was Israel so keen?" "Because the entire Arab world was supporting Pakistan. The Arabs welcomed the Pakistani action in 1971. Pakistan was Israel's enemv so Bangladesh had become Israel's friend. Å weakened Pakistan meant a weaker Middle East that depended for many things on Paki-

"Didn't it bother the Arabs that Pakistanis were killing innocents?" "Does it ever matter who kills whom?

WE are witnessing the worst crisis in Palestine till it came into a halfbaked existence. Having seen the

land at first hand, I would have been happy if I could meet someone who could tell me who is to blame for the endless violence. Everyone has a point of view. The US media is endlessly accusing Arafat for having refused the last-ditch deal, which Clinton offered in his twilight days. Arab leaders say it was like accepting 'occupation'. I only know that both side could have done better but it's a land where things have been allowed to reach this point. The powerful countries could have done much more. After all, if they could

ist PLO. In Palestine, nationalism was once pre-religious but religion was used to break up a secular enemy. Now Hamas is the biggest factor sending many suicide bombers into Palestine. Now Israel occupies Palestine but is unable to protect its own people. Israel's child has now become its own assassin.

AS the funeral procession of a dead Palestinian moved in the street, the camera moved to a Hamas sup-

porter walking next to the corpse

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The Bangladeshi who asks is full of rage towards the US but he is planning to go there anyway. He gives many reasons for his decision to leave but he is carrying a bagful of anger too along with his suitcases. Will he transfer it to someone and maybe even tell his son about the injustices that he thinks have been heaped on the less powerful by the

> What will happen after that? *** *** ***

I met this man, a recruiter for a

words I heard in a Hamas procession. He wanted to kill Jews. It wasn't about Palestine, about justice, about anything else. It was about hate. Everything else has been pushed out of this theatre of history.

If the Arab is a prisoner of hate the Zionist is no different.

I met him in one of my trips to Sri Lanka where the arms trade has really gone up. Now that a peace

move is on there, maybe it will

decline. I met him in the breakfast

room. He was a security expert

helping people to select the right

type of arms to buy. The conversa-

"No Arab will ever defeat Israel.

That is over. Arabs are buffoons.

They are incapable of fighting the

Jews. If Americans were not there

we would have finished the problem

by now. It's our land as wished by

"You don't think that Palestinians

"Yes. A right to go back to Mecca.

It's our land. Let them go back to the

lands they stole from us in Arab

countries. They are good only for

camel herding and becoming

WOGS (Working on Government

He said all this without smiling,

stabbing his food with a fruit knife. I

was embarrassed. I could say

nothing. I had never met a stranger

ion reached Palestine.

God.'

Service)."

have any rights."

have suffered most in Western hands, they have no hatred for them. It's the Arabs they hate. suppose this is called blood hate.

When intifada began, 25 Palestinians died for one Israeli killed. Now that the arithmetic has undergone a deadly change. Now the death rate is for every Israeli killed, three Palestinians die. In the most horrific way, the suicide bombing has proved to be successful in terms of body counts. It fuels the Arabs to push for more, it pushes the Israelis to go for the occupation of Palestine and attack Arafat.

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AARON uses this number equation as well when he talks. Aaron has argued for years that only peace can win the war in the Middle East. He is an Israeli peace activist and there are many like him. He has suffered jail and has no regular employment. A few days after the September 11 attack, I met him in Delhi. He was staring at the TV showing the NY carnage. Seeing Osama's face, he softly said, "Sharon's best friend."

Seeing my dismayed face he said, "Don't worry. Peace always wins." He smiled with an effort.

AS the TV was going on and on about the violence in Palestine, I went and opened my almirah drawer and looked at a small wooden pendant carved with the word "shalom" meaning peace in Hebrew. A Scottish missionary who ran a refugee network in Jerusalem gave it to me some years ago.

She had said that the wood came from trees that were descendants of the trees from which the cross of Jesus Christ was made

I held it in my hand yesterday for a

Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

As the TV was going on and on about the violence in Palestine, I went and opened my almirah drawer and looked at a small wooden pendant carved with the word "shalom" meaning peace in Hebrew. A Scottish missionary who ran a refugee network in Jerusalem gave it to me some years ago. She had said that the wood came from trees that were descendants of the trees from which the cross of Jesus Christ was made. I held it in my hand yesterday for a long time.

set up Israel plunk in the middle of its enemies, they could have set up Palestine too next to Israel. But they aren't waiting for a just peace, but a Middle East peace on their own terms. Western powers have taken advantage of the Israeli fear of persecution to manipulate them into a belligerent stand. Hate is the operative word now.

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JUST as conversation in that area seems to leap over centuries with ease, so does the hatred between the Arabs and the Israelis. In that part of the world, there is no culture except that of religion and no religion except that of history. The boy who kill himself blowing up will swear on a book that doesn't belong to his faith but more that documents hatreds spanning centuries in that land. Hate resides in the soil and soil is history there. And history is increasingly becoming religion. *** *** ***

HAMAS is the most heard word now but it is a creation of Israel to counter

"How many can they kill? How many can they send to the grave? We have many more who are ready to die. We will not stop till the Jews are dead.

It's no longer about freedom but about hatred. It's not about justice but revenge. It's about racial hate. It's no different from the communal riots that have scarred Guiarat recently when innocents were killed by both sides. I was filled with revulsion at the Hamas words. Somehow the most powerful suicide bomber has struck. It has killed tolerance in

THE USA is somehow involved with every conflict. With every conflict its power increases but peace seems a little more damaged. It has even diluted the moral value of condemning the word "terror" having monopolised using the word for its own convenience only.

"When the Israelis kill, its selfdefence, when the Palestinians kill radical Islamic branch of militants right in front of the Al-Azhar Mosque campus in Cairo. It stands next to a huge souk, an over and underground market where everything that "oriental" fancies can dream up is sold. Some of the shops are 400-500 years old. I had bought some perfume and incense and stood on the pavement with an African friend watching the pensioners in uniform walk by, stop, shake hands and then ask for bakseesh. A young man stopped by and probably seeing such odd faces began talking. The conversation ended up in Palestine.

"How can Israel win? We have hundreds ready to kill. If need be we will kill Arafat but the fight against the infidel will go on."

"Are you going to kill innocents." He didn't smile. He asked me a ' Are you not from the path of

Allah?" Such fierce eyes he had. I knew what he was capable of.

who hated another this way. It's amazing but although they

Blowback: Bitter fruit of US

I remembered after so many years that what he said were the

foreign policy

LL of a sudden after the 9/11, the U.S. government and the mass media discovered just how criminal a regime the Taliban really was. A few, including some scholars at the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver -- the school where Dr. Condolezza Rice, one of the key players in Bush foreign policy team did her doctoral work -- even recognized that the Taliban was a direct result of the CIA support and financing of the jihad-making "holy warriors" who fought the Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The supreme irony, of course, is that CIA itself recognized the general threat to the security of US citizens games abroad and coined the word "blowback" to refer to this threat. A book bearing the same title, written by the renowned East Asia and US foreign policy expert Prof. Chalmers Johnson which was published two vears ago, criticized US policies in Asia severely on almost exactly the same grounds. However, it has been largely ignored in the official circles..What the policy makers in the US apparently do not want to admit is that the logic of CIA involvement, -and more generally, as Johnson argues, aggressive US interventions abroad -- always make even more enemies for the US than what they started with. Financing the "holy warriors" in Afghanistan, using bin Laden and the Saudi monarchy as moneybags and the Pakistani army and intelligence services as supervisors was justified by Reagan-Bush Sr. administrations as one way to contribute to the project of toppling the Soviet Union. But like most CIA ventures since the agency was created after World War II it has "blown back" in the U.S. government's face.

In 1965, the CIA actively supported general Suharto in his bid to topple the nationalist regime of Sukarno in Indonesia and to wipe out the powerful Communist Party(PKI) there. Suharto and the CIA used Islamic fanaticism to justify the murder of almost one million communists and others, including many ethnic Chinese. Suharto ruled Indo-

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

nesia with iron hand, making it "safe" for Exxon-Mobil, and other foreign investors and his own family. Today, a couple of years after Suharto's overthrow, Indonesia is a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalists who now threaten U.S. interests there and are siding with bin Laden. Too sensitive a spot for direct US intervention, now quiet deals are underway between the FBI and the Indonesian authorities. However, just like in Pakistan.US can no longer take for granted the lovalties of the officials in the Indonesian armed forces.

The stakes are indeed high, and from all the available evidence, not much thought seems to have been given to the broader and long run consequences for the US and the world of another war against Iraq. Neither the CIA which according to Johnson, invented the expression nor the rest of the US foreign policy and military establishment, seems to be able to grasp the true significance of

intelligence community, and law enforcement circles to the US cause. George Bush Sr. was godfather to

"blowback"---in

retrospect, an ironic idea

tinged with tragedy.

one of General Manuel Noriega's children. Noriega was another CIA asset, used against the nationalist Panamanian ruler General Torrijos, who negotiated the nationalization of the Panama Canal. In 1989, Bush ordered an invasion of Panama when Noriega, another "blow black" for the CIA, lost favour after turning into the "bad drug-running boy". Several thousand Panamanians

died when Stealth planes bombed Chorillo, a working class neighborhood, during the invasion.

In the early 1980s after the overthrow of the pro-U.S. Shah of Iran by Shiite Islamic fundamentalists, the CIA supported and pushed Saddam Hussain to wage war against Iran. For several years, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Iranian workers and soldiers died in this war. Now Saddam Hussain is competing with bin Laden as number one in the U.S. top list of enemies. In spite of almost universal opposition outside of US to an attack against Irag, the administration seems intent on carrying it out

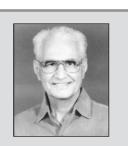
in the not-too-distant future. Now, a possible invasion of Iraq could turn into a major long range disaster for not only the people in Irag and the Middle East, but also for the U.S. foreign policy elite. Even if Saddam Hussain is killed or captured and many thousands are massacred, the anti-U.S. tide in the region will reach other parts of the Middle East, particularly oil rich Saudi Arabia where the regime is already tottering.

Another war against Iraq, which seems to have emerged now as a possible byproduct of the attack against bin Laden, will isolate the U.S. even more. French, Chinese and Russian oil companies, which have heavy investments in Iraq, will not be pleased, and eventually the "war against terrorism" could turn into a major regional entanglement.

The stakes are indeed high, and from all the available evidence, not much thought seems to have been given to the broader and long run consequences for the US and the world of another war against Iraq. Neither the CIA which according to Johnson, invented the expression, nor the rest of the US foreign policy and military establishment, seems to be able to grasp the true significance of "blowback"---in retrospect, an ironic idea tinged with tragedy.

Haider A Khan, a faculty member of University of

Speculation is the name of the game



M B NAQVI

WO developments have concentrated the minds of armchair strategists, observers of political scene and those whose business it is to comment The first is the repeated assertions of American generals that the defeated Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements are regrouping both in eastern and southern Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan which need to be captured or killed The second is the recent speech of Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vaipavee in Shimla in which he said that while there was no likelihood of war with Pakistan, the Indian armed forces will not be withdrawn from the borders to their normal situations. The question is what then are the Indian armed forces are doing at the borders? It has puzzled observers

Various possible scenarios are being formulated. Awar had been

excluded quite sometime ago But then the insistence of the Indian government to keep troops on forward locations becomes inexplicable. It is to be assumed that New Delhi must have good reasons for doing so. For, it must be costing a

pretty penny to India. What is the

purpose of this extra expense? Forward deployment along the LOC or the working boundary in the area of Jammu-Sialkot could possibly be adjusted for preventing infiltration of Jihadis from Azad Kashmir and Pakistan. But what purpose would be served in other areas along the international border? Even the job of stopping infiltration is not new; Indian army in Kashmir was meant to do that

anyway. What is new? The American general's statements actually disclose their minds working on the subject of what to do about these Al-Qaeda and Taliban

PLAIN WORDS In fact many more people perceive the Americans to be

doing in Pakistan what they set out to do in Afghanistan by military force. Only the means are different in the case of Pakistan; they are political and diplomatic. The aim is the same... There are aspects of the complex situation in the region that simply invite speculation and there need be no apology.

Ordinarily what would suggest that they want to pursue them. The kind of resistance that these defeated Taliban and Al-Qaeda people have shown in eastern Afghanistan was wholly unexpected As plenty of official Pakistani statements have shown, the military equipment is no problem for Afghan Taliban; Russians are supposed to have left huge caches of armaments in many parts of Afghanistan. But from the American viewpoint, something more is needed. These are military skills. The Taliban or Al-Qaeda men were not known for their formal military knowledge Here the profusion of American media outpourings about domestic

political situation of Pakistan ecomes relevant. American media have noted the compulsions that made Gen. Pervez Musharraf to retreat from his Jan 12 policy formulation. This retreat is taking full place and needs explanation. One of the reasons is said to be the political need for him to recruit the aid and support of main religious policies that have been the traditional allies of the army. But is forthcoming referendum and elections the only reason for this retreat? The Americans seem perplexed. They have their suspicions about the solidity of support for Gen. Musharraf from inside the army. Indeed an article in NYT wondered in its headline itself about the personal safety of Gen. Musharraf, many US officials fear that he might be in danger inside his own constituency, although to Pakistanis this looks far-fetched and quite unlikely. Still, Americans are the best informed foreigners about Pakistan; their fears cannot be brushed aside.

It is again hard to be sure about

what the really informed Americans are planning. At one level there are fears that they would engage in hot pursuit of the regrouped Taliban and Al-Qaeda men inside

Pakistan That would moment of truth for many Pakistanis and would test the limits of the Pakistan-US alliance. At any rate, one American fear can be taken for granted: that in the regrouping of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements some retired military personnel and possibly a few renegade elements of the army might be involved. This has to be kept in mind.

Speculation being speculation, people seem to go as far as connecting the Indian troops movement with the possible American contingency plans for certain eventualities n Pakistan. The assumption behind such far-fetched speculation is that the military to military cooperation between the US and India is far more serious and genuine being between two democracies. The other assumption is that for the Americans, their alliance with Pakistan has many reservations and even doubts. At any rate, they actually press-gagged Pakistan into their alliance. In fact many more people perceive the Americans to be doing in Pakistan what they set out to do in Afghanistan by military force. Only the means are different in the case of Pakistan; they are political and diplomatic. The aim is

The name of the game for observers in Pakistan is speculation. There are aspects of the complex situation in the region that simply invite speculation and there need be no apology.

MB Naqvi is a leading columist in Pakistan.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE TO THE

Questions for Kibria

Mr. Kibria asserted what we were always trying convey to the politicians, I meant not resorting to falsehood and deceptive tactics symbol of our freedom", March 17). But, he probably forgets that it also applies equally to Awami League

and its party members. The saying in Bangla, "Mayer Chey-a Mashir Dorod Beshi", is so applicable in our political arena. The people, who talk too much about Bangabandhu, in fact brought his downfall by their psychotic attitude of creating a god out of him. Regardless, Bangabandhu must be respected but, fighting over a mere portrait shows the low-standards of

our so-called politicians.

And there is another band of politicians who talk too much about our glorious Liberation War, when they had engaged in questionable actions themselves, during the turbulent days of 1971. To enlighten us, would the honourable former nance Minister, disclose whether he was under the payroll of the government of Pakistan as a CSP during our Liberation War in 1971? yes, then why did he choose to serve the Pakistani military junta while they were brutally killing innocent civilians in the then East

There were many patriotic Bengali government officers who did not join e service during that period in

support of our great cause Unfortunately, most of our CSP corps did serve the Pakistani Government during the war, and magically switched side to put on Mujib Coat right after December 16th. That was one of the greatest deception and falsehood experienced by the nation till today. Nafees K.

26th March parade

Texas, USA

The army had to bring in a large of tanks for the ndependence Day March Past at the National Parade grounds. Now these tanks are being

loaded onto massive 18wheeler trailers (Mercedes as if you didn't

know) and taken back to the barracks.

In order to save the public from the inevitable traffic jams this would cause, the transportation is done at night. That's unlikely to cause too much of an inconvenience as the convoys would hardly pass any residential areas

Nah! Wishful thinking. They did it right at one in the afternoon. Probably to get back in time for lunch and to hell with the traffic. **Bastiat**

everyone's mind, I thought I would

share a small fact that will make

A Bengali hero Now that the Middle East is again on

ones like myself, proud. A Bengali pilot, Squadron Leader Saiful Islam (ex-director of the Film Development Corporation s the only man in history to have shot down Israeli combat iets in aerial dogfights. As an officer on deputation to Jordan this redoubtable pilot had a verified claim of four downed Israeli planes during the

Bengalis, even the most pacifist

1967 war. With all their hi-tech gadgetry and all these Middle East wars, no Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi, or Jordanian pilot has ever matched this feat. And the English thought we were

Please do not try to

not a 'martial' race!

Missouri, USA

the Government tries to alter history by-passing a statement who eclared our great Independence War, is not only silly but also dangerous. I don't know what purpose this serve but definitely create confusions for our next generation. I was born after our independ-

am writing on top of what Mr. F.

Majumder wrote in his letter "The

horrifying night of Mar 25". The way

change facts

ence. To know my roots, my history-I had to rely on books written by renowned writers, stories from heard from my older family members who saw the war themselves. If I have to believe what has been posted as a Government Statement on 25th of March in The Daily Star, I have to unlearn whatever I've learnt about the history of my country throughout my life

independent country is beyond these political games. I dream of government statements with history that gives due credits to all our great leaders who led us to Abdullah-Al Amin Singapore

National Priorities

hope Mr Anwar Babar ("Highway deaths and Rabindra reads this who had been quite voca about deaths on the Bangladesh highways. He is questioning if we have set our priorities right and has been writing about

long ago there was a letter in this column "For whom the letters "For whom the letters scroll". I doubt if the persons at the helm of this country's power want to pay any heed to what its people are facing and expressing. Do they read newspaper sections dealing with people's plights at all? Our "leaders" just want to cling to

He should remember that not so

TO THE EDITOR

power and make as much money as they can at the quickest possible time. While at it they dwell on useless issues. How else it can be that almost a week has been spent on the matter of whose portrait(s) to A Distressed Observer