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Upazila back again

Eleven years after cancelling it, BNP decides to restore UZ

HE cabinet committee's decision to restore the Upazila system is a major step forward towards setting up local government in Bangladesh. There is perhaps no other issue on which so much of national attention has been focused as on local government. Every government and every political party have pledged over and over again their support to decentralise the government and set up local government. And yet very little has been done in setting up any local government structure ever since the last upazila system was dismantled by the BNP government in 1991. To Awami League government's credit, it took up the task of setting up local government structure in earnest and prepared an elaborate proposal. However the AL could not implement its proposals because of internal dissentions and bureaucratic wrangling. Most importantly, AL was unable to hold the crucial elections to the local bodies because of non-participation by the

To BNP's credit, it picked up the issue where the AL had left off. The important new element added by the new government is clearly defining the roles of the upazila chairman and the local MP. It was this particular problem which was making the BNP hesitant about moving ahead on this issue. The process ahead now is to place the same recommendations before the cabinet and then to the parliament. It is our view that the present government should open a dialogue with the opposition at this stage to solicit its views so that we do not have a repeat of the standoff that we last saw. We think the process of dialogue should start now before the issue goes to the cabinet and before it is placed in the parliament. The faster we start this process the better. The positive thing on the upazila issue is that bulk of the work has already been done by the previous government, and to its credit the BNP, instead of reinventing the wheel, picked up from where the work was left off by the AL. Therefore we think there exists a strong basis for a consensus between our two political rivals and that an immediate move towards a dialogue will strengthen that possibility.

We cannot overstate the urgency and the importance of setting up local government. Many of the ills of governance and flawed development are rooted in the fact that we have no mechanism to involve the rural people in the governance process. We commend the government for its move in this direction and suggest that it attaches the highest priority to it.

Delayed DU reopening

The core problem remains unresolved

HE syndicate decision to reopen Dhaka University has a string attached to it. Academic and other activities of the country's premier educational institution will resume on October 3 only if nothing untoward happens over the next 15 days or so. In other words, the highest governing body of the university is still not convinced that the core reason behind the recent campus commotion has been effectively resolved. Otherwise, they would have surely opted for a much earlier date. The question is, if the problem has not been addressed as yet, what is the guarantee that it would be over the next couple of weeks or so? What assurance is there that the DU would not face the same fate as the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, which had to be closed down sine die on September 11 just over a month after it had been reopened following a prolonged spell of unsched-

In all likelihood, the decision has been imposed on the syndicate by the government, which refuses to accept that its meddling with the university affairs coupled with highhandedness of the student front of the ruling party led to the problem in the first place. First, it let partisan consideration dictate appointment of the vice-chancellor and then indulged in partisan activities of the new vice-chancellor. Moreover, in its imprudent haste, the government allowed the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) to force the resignation of the Shamsunnahar Hall provost, who only had a few days left of her tenure. Finally came the unprecedented police raid at the dead of night on the women's hall of residence. What followed was unsavoury yet unavoidable. The vice-chancellor had to resign in the face of student unrest and the university closed indefinitely. The saving grace was formation and subsequent report of a one-man judicial probe commission. Unfortunately, its recommendations have not yet been fully implemented, owning, once again, to partisan considerations.

The government, and the ruling party by implication, should realise that it itself is the major impediment for the DU towards smooth functioning. Media reports have it that the delay in DU reopening is designed to allow the new JCD committee enough time to settle down on the campus. Basically, the government is prolonging the problem instead of resolving it.

The government must let the DU and all other major educational institutions function independently. Need they be reminded again and again that their mindless pursuit of control over the campuses has been making uncertain the future of thousands of general students?

US makes its case against Baghdad at the UN



HARUN UR RASHID

N 12 September, President Bush had addressed the General Assembly of the UN to build his case for military action in Iraq. He told the UN that "action is unavoidable" unless Iraq ends its weapons programme. In other words if the UN Security Council fails to act, the US will not remain a spectator to the build up of weapons of mass destruction by the Iraqi regime. The British Prime Minister on 11 September expressed similar sentiments when he said that if the will of the UN was ignored, action would follow

Prior to his statement at the UN, President Bush phoned almost all the Western leaders and apparently told them he now wanted to work through the UN to get a Security Council resolution in favour of an international military coalition against Baghdad. Recently he met Canada's Prime Minister and the British Prime Minister and discussed this matter.

Initially the Bush administration dismissed any role of the UN in respect of its military operation in Iraq and President Bush, in a major policy speech at West Point in June, suggested he could not be patient. He said: "If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long." By August he insisted that he was a "patient man" and suggested that war was not the only alternative. The shift was palpably clear.

The Bush administration is

many of its actions. For example, it withdrew from the UN International Criminal Court. It worked against ban on land mines. It voted against mechanism of verification of torture under the 1984 UN Convention on Torture. Being the lone superpower the Bush administration appears to have adopted unilateralist policies often ignoring multi-lateral approach. It appears that the Bush administration has finally bowed to pressure of international opinion against its plan of unilateral action.

Clinton erred by not taking out President Saddam and were anxious to finish the iob. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Deputy Defence Secretary Wolfowitz apparently supported this

President Bush was initially inclined to support the views of the hawks. However the opinion poll taken in the US demonstrated that ordinary Americans supported the removal of Iraqi regime with allies'

ensuing election on 22 September and now the latest poll indicated that Schroeder was for the first time ahead of Stoiber. When Germany came so loudly against US plan against Irag, it had an impact on British and French public as well. Tony Blair was losing the public relations battle in Britain. Anti-US sentiment was hardening in his own back-bench of MPs. France did not support any action without the UN. Although Tony Blair continued to

neutral observers believe that allegations against Irag should not be construed as hard evidence and until now neither the US nor the British authorities had come up with facts as hard evidence. All that they are saving against Irag fall within the realm of speculations and predictions and human predictions often

UN Resolution and action: The key Security Council resolution 687 of April 3 of 1991 was in respect of the issue of weapons inspections talks about military operations against Israel.

It is true that President Saddam Hussein induced the crisis by not co-operating with the UN resolutions. If the Council fails to act decisively, the US and Britain can go alone to attack Irag. The guestion is, what happens if it goes without the UN's approval or without broad consensus?

The Arab League in the recent Cairo meeting said that war on Iraq would open the "gates of hell" in the region. Pakistan President Musharraf was of the view that military action on Iraq might weaken war on terrorism in Afghanistan and beyond. Indonesia believes that military action is likely to divide Indonesians that is not good for its fragile democracy. The UN Secretary General on 12 September cautioned the world leaders as to the wider unintended consequences in the Middle East if a unilateral attack is executed on Irag.

At present there appears to be no UN mandate to make war on Irag. A new Security Council resolution is necessary to allow it if Iraq chooses to ignore the Council resolution. The Security Council should enforce its own earlier resolution on weapons inspections. The ball is now in the court of the UN Security Council. In fact all depends on how the other three permanent members of the Council -- Russia, France and China -- look at the issue and vote in the Council

The Council needs to be firm on Irag, otherwise international community might lose their confidence in its functions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The UN's predecessor, the League of Nations, failed to stand up to Germany, Japan and Italy in the 30s and became irrelevant. The same fate should not occur for the UN.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN. Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

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and it agreed to make its case at the UN to establish a broad coalition to the perceived threat of the Baghdad

The question is why did the shift take place? It seems not hard to read some of the reasons. Many believe that the Bush administration is split into the doves and the hawks. The Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage reportedly warned that rushing to war without direct provocation would alienate America's allies and mark a dangerous turn in US foreign policy. This view was supported by former Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger, former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and House Majority leader Republican Congressman Dick Armey.

On the other hand the hawks, the Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, House Majority whip Republican Congressman Tom

support. A New York Times/CBS News poll, published on 8th September, has shown that more than half of the US public believe the White House has yet to make a clear case against Iraq. Obviously President Bush did not wish to go on a path which had no popular support in the

Another fact is that President Bush seems to have awakened to the idea that he needed broad consensus, not least because he did not wish to be blamed for an Iraqi quagmire -- one that might involve a long-term US peacekeeping presence in Iraq -- when 2004 President election would be held.

The wind turned blowing against the US's proposed unilateral action when Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany clearly told that he would not support any military action against Iraq and the German public overwhelmingly supported him. In fact when he made the announcement he was trailing behind his conservative publicly support the hawkish views of the US, it is believed that in private he cautioned President Bush not to go alone. In the recent meeting at the Presidential retreat, Camp David in Maryland, the British Prime Minister was believed to have told President Bush that he needed to put a UN cover around his plan for military operation against Baghdad regime. In other words the President's objective was right but the means was wrong

Meanwhile public relations campaign is at foot from both sides. A non-government London-based think-tank (International Institute of Strategic Studies) released a paper in which it concluded that Iraq was months away from building nuclear weapons, if it could lav its hands on enriched uranium. On the other hand former UN arms inspector US national Scott Ritter was invited to Baghdad. He addressed the members of the Iraqi Parliament and declared that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction on its soil. Many

Baghdad. Iraq accepted the obligation to remove and destroy weapons of mass destruction and in particular agreed not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons. This is a price Iraq has to pay for its senseless invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Iraq did not conduct itself in accordance with the 1991 UN

and not about regime change in

resolution and Iraq should admit the UN inspectors and provide them unfettered access to sites in the country. The resolution of 1991 specified that economic sanctions would not be lifted until Irag complied. Nowhere in the resolution is stipulated that if Iraq does not scrupulously follow the terms of UN resolution, it invites an armed attack to change its leader. Many in the Middle East region maintain that Iraq is not the only country which continues to violate the UN Security Council resolution. Many other countries including Israel may be accused of violating Security Coun-

Maoists intensify attacks: Is any negotiated settlement possible in Nepal?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

the "Maoists" appear to have intensified their attacks on the government troops and police in Nepal evidently in a bid to give the impression that they are far from being weakened by government losses to the radicals. In two daring attacks this week they killed a number of soldiers and policemen in two encounters in places quite away from Kathmandu. The government has admitted the losses which is only seldom done. The development came when an impression was gaining ground that the Maoists were on the defensive and looking for face-saving in a compromise. But it was not the case even if they are on the defensive to an extent. On the contrary, they seem determined to convey the message that the radicals are a force to reckon with which is capable of launching attacks on the army garrisons outside the capital. The onslaught has embarrassed the government. which in recent times boasted of success in the anti-radical operations by killing many of the ultras.

ing has raised questions about the claims the government makes that

he claims are not baseless to an extent but it its also true that the Maoists are not taking things lying down. They are responding to operations against them with tough ferocity. This makes the scene complicated as no side is willing for a retreat.

The radicals some time ago offered olive branch by expressing readiness for a dialogue. They are containing state of emergency.

The radicals were somewhat less active for sometime but there has been no slackening in their activities and they launched daring attacks in their areas of influence killing a large number of soldiers and police. The Maoists too suffered big losses as both sides stepped up their operations. However, the government of prime minister Sher and expectedly Washington, as the powerful democracy, assured all support to democratic government of Nepal against the hardline communists. The visits of the King to India and China and that of the prime minister to the United States resulted in tough posture of the government leading to bigger actions by the army and the police against the Maoists. This may be a

suffered badly some time ago and this could be a reason for softening of their attitude but they cannot afford to be seen as almost a spent force since laying down of arms would only give such an impression. Besides, the Maoists are aware that the government is somewhat weak now because it is an interim administration that will continue till the next polls. The parliament was dissolved at the advice of prime minister Deuba, who has been asked by the

gency has of late been withdrawn and this perhaps encourages the radicals for fresh attacks. The government can ill afford

demonstrating softening of the

policy particularly when opposition as well as Koirala faction are accusing it of failure in dealing with the radicals. Besides. all sides concerned have also an eye on the next general elections. As the political divisions are being sharpened with the polls drawing nearer, for the radicals it is time for renewed attacks. As such they now may be less keen for a dialogue. Consequently, while the dialogue is not on the cards Nepal seems set to remain embroiled with the Maoists problem. It is unfortunate for a nation experiencing political instability along with other problems. To facilitate the talks, both sides need a spirit of accommodation and to shift from their hitherto known rigid positions. But this is lacking and the stand-off continues as a logical corollary to the absence of flexibility. Although a section of the government feels re-imposition of emergency, ultras clearly want to derive advantage the existing situation. On the other hand, the interim government of prime minister Deuba obviously is keen to project itself tough with the radicals. The scenario is complex. No dialogue is expected in these circumstances unless a positive development occurs unexpectedly. This condition may continue till a new government takes over following the next polls in November. The new government may take a fresh look into the policy

the insurgency is being crushed with SAARC summit took place in the States where he discussed the a great success. It is possible that country early this year amidst the issue with president George Bush



HE radical leftists known as

The unabated intermittent fight-

fighting to topple the constitutional

MATTERS AROUND US

The government can ill afford demonstrating softening of the policy particularly when opposition as well as Koirala faction are accusing it of failure in dealing with the radicals. Besides, all sides concerned have also an eye on the next general elections. As the political divisions are being sharpened with the polls drawing nearer, for the radicals it is time for renewed attacks. As such they now may be less keen for a dialogue. Consequently, while the dialogue is not on the cards Nepal seems set to remain embroiled with the Maoists problem. It is unfortunate for a nation experiencing political instability along with other problems

monarchy and establish a Republic in the land locked impoverished country which is otherwise a lovely land of enormous scenic beauty. The overture followed intense fighting between the security forces with the ultras in several places of Nepal in recent months in which both sides suffered heavy losses. The offer of the Maoists came close on the heels of visits by King Ganevndra to two vast neighbours - India and China where he discussed the issue that has convulsed Nepal for last few years but taken an alarming turn since last year. So serious is the magnitude of this problem that a state of emergency had to be declared in the country late last year and even the last declared the state of emergency to wipe out the ultras, says that strength of the radicals is on the wane after massive operations by the security forces. Mr.Deuba. who took over from former premier G.P. Koirala, also of ruling Nepali Congress, had initially favoured talks with the radicals as he adopted a comparatively less hawkish approach to the Maoists. Some contacts were established brokered by the main opposition Communist Party but the talks made no headway and the cease fire collapsed The radicals took up arms again and there has been no let up in the

A few months ago, the prime minister paid a visit to the United reason for which the radicals offered dialogue. Many believe that China may be behind the Maoists activities in Nepal but Beijing has made it clear that it is an internal matter of Nepal with which China enjoys good ties. Still, some quarters believe that the radicals must be drawing some sustenance from the giant communist neighbour. In any case, China does not openly figure in the scene. Neither the Kathmandu government has anything to in the matter against

The offer of dialogue was rejected as the government insisted that the ultras must first surrender their arms, a demand which the Maoists are highly unlikely to accept. The radicals may have King to continue until the new government comes in following elections. The development has caused further problems within the ruling Nepali Congress as the faction led by Deuba's rival G.P.Koirala, who is the chief of party, expelled the premier for taking this decision without consulting him and the party. The party is currently plaqued by internal squabbles and the radicals know about this situation. Last year's Palace massacre leading to the killings of King. Queen and the crown prince had already delivered a big blow to the country. It is possible that the Maoists had stepped up their activities considering all these weaknesses of the government. The state of emer-

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Senior Special

-- either to continue with tough line

or softening attitude to a dialogue.

OPINION

The sultans of public choice

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

NE of my school friends long settled in America now alternates his time between the states and Bangladesh. He is a doctorate of mechanical engineering and was once working on the aero-dynamical stress factor of metals for use in commercial space travel in linking cities. I was thrilled at the idea, and naturally became quizzical about his present nature of residency. My friend did not keep me guessing. It was much candid of him in telling me that he could go no further, both professionally and socially in his adopted country, America. Fortunately, he has his country of birth to return to in pursuing even greater heights of success with all the trappings of power and

It did not take me long to understand that he seeks a position where he will be waited on, looked up to, someone with a 'touch me not' protective shield: a Sultan of a sort The path in his words is to return to his people, the native place of his forefathers. It is his constituency and he will rise from here. His American charisma will in all likelihood

soil. He is keenly cultivating his ties, helping people with the gospels of self help, teaching them ways of building a new world out of poverty and backwardness. Once the base is built, he will jump on to a political bandwagon at the opportune moment. And if luck works, and luck shall, he will become the people's representative, firmly set to become I wish my friend's pious inten-

tions a good luck, if he does not succumb to the glitter of the office and gets blinded by it. These are not mere calumnies, for we have seen the ruling party law-maker with a golden crown on his head. At least he is such an endearing Sultan who does not flinch from getting photographed when his adoring subjects are crowning him. It is not a playful banter. The tragedy of the abasement of our representative democracy, and the decline of public esteem of our representatives is a deeply foreboding prospect for the country. It is tantamount to rendering the democratic process ineffective and paving the way for its abandonment as an ineffectual experiment. Its alternative is a rerun of

wilful exercise of power by an autocratic ruler that has already scandalised our institutions by patronising greed and violence. Our democratic set-up has yet

not been able to shake off the legacy of the autocratic ruler. His legacy has become the grazing ground of our representative process. Sadly, governance has become difficult, because the greed of a share in collective feasting is making a favoured inroad. Our politics has a test of character to prove. Naturally, the hallowed concept of 'serving the people' suffered when the lawmakers at the first opportunity passed greater allowances and perks for themselves. The rationale that can be put forward is neither strong enough nor self-respecting; that they would be hard pressed without it and fall prey to temptations! This cannot justify the duty free import of luxury and jeeps sleek cars. It is the people's representatives who should be among the first to remember that their conveniences and perks should be of modest nature, lest they become the opulence of a Sultan in a country, which is still

overwhelmingly poor. The perks and conveniences attract so called Modis and Agarwals. They filter down to every level of representative democracy and party politics. So that Mukis and Tagars want a share in the tender. The fallout can be shattering -- end of the promising life of a bright student, Sabequnnahar Sony. It is very difficult to believe that Alauddin, one of the 23 top terrorists of the country could declare his candidature in DCC election and can hide so long in Dhaka City without the mighty cover of a conniving sultan of public choice. Dinesh Kumar said with his life that Alauddin was not his friend, even though the cops stand badly tainted. It is an irony that many that

robbed their way during the autocrat's rule are now safely ensconced as people's representative at different levels. Both the ruling and the opposition parties have their brood of robber barons. One may rightly wonder why a legislator who was elected when his party was voted out of power would be abandoned for a business tycoon unless his contributory might is of considerable nature. This kind of deal does not consecrate politics. For wealth is another weapon in the armoury of

politics of expedience.

Although the election commission has set a ceiling on electoral campaign expenditure, our electoral process has become a privilege of the wealthy and the mighty. The nature and size of the electoral budget looks like an investment. For someone with convenient connections it is not much difficult to raise an electoral fund. It is the prospect or the need of future return that attracts donors. Where wealth seeks an office for use as a protective shield, the trade off with the political machine is of mutual necessity. This is the general rule. By any measure, the marriage of socially high profile with wealth or the vice versa is a combination that readily earns acceptance and adoration. I is easier for politics to ride this combination in order to put up a good show and to go to power.

The pursuit of political office is more and more becoming a case of mundane self-advancement, not a matter of fulfilling a pious undertaking or a holy vow. Success in the electoral process therefore has the importance of being a member of a select body. The distinguished nature of the office acquires the

trappings of pageant and opulence. The trappings, in fact, alienate the office holder and mocks at the general standard of living of Bangladesh. This creates a sense of disenchantment that has every chance of deepening further into misgivings and mistrust. Representative democracy and public representatives will decline in public esteem.

This is the tragedy with our sultans of public choice. It is more a matter of anguish, rather than of direct harm, because the higher level public representatives have much lesser direct public contact. Often the experience with city corporation, municipality, upazila and union council chairmen is of frustration and disgust. The reports of arrogant conduct and harassment are often heard. It was greatly believed that the election of city corporation commissioners would improve the general standard of the city. The belief has crashed to despair. The situation has deteriorated further. Prominent commissioners have fallen to the gun. Newspaper reports indicate that great many of them are from the underworld or have tainted record Many of them live in mortal fear.

What we miss most is that they lack the finer elements of representative leadership. I remember the municipal election that was held a year prior to Ayub's takeover. It was perhaps 1957. In my area, the commissioner candidates were Moulvi Abul Hasnat, a prominent aristocrat of the city, advocate Badiruddin Ahmed, a noted lawyer of B.Ahmed & Co, Taqiullah a leftist activist and son of Dr. Mohammed Shahidullah. Abul Hasnat won as he did earlier beating Labiuddin Siddiky, the father of Tanvir Ahmed Siddiky and also Alhaj Sharfuddin the father of Jatiya Party leader Jahangir Adel. Reconciliation followed, with the candidates embracing each other. Dr. Bhabesh Nandy, the outstanding physician of the city was elected from Wari. The present possessors of the

position seem a far cry from the model personalities we had seen as city representatives. It is sad but true that many self-respecting persons experience much discomfort when it comes to getting some paper certified or issued by the local commissioners. The lesser sultans in many cases are with considerable fortune and the public office gives

them the clout to guard it well. Many also build the fortune as they go, benefiting from the influence of the office. Their pomp and arrogant bearing is visible in the way they conduct themselves. One is inclined to think that the office serves the There is nothing wrong in public

representatives being men of wealth and might. But it is definitely a matter of public scrutiny when the office serves the pomp and opulence of the holder. This, however, in no way means that the holders of public office should lead the life of a fakir like Sultan Nasiruddin, by stitching caps. The public representative should expect only that much convenience from the office that keeps the office from suffering indignity. Even the wealthy should be discreet in using even his own wealth in adding pomp to his office. It is necessary for the transparency of both the government and the political process that the affluence of the public representative is properly monitored. For without it, the public office and representation would decline in public esteem, turning public representatives indeed into sultans of public choice