

## Shaky start to the UP Elections

Government must keep its promise of extending all help

THE long awaited UP elections has gotten off to a shaky start. Given our propensity for violence in elections one killed may sound quite acceptable. Not to us. In fact the news of one killed hides the more important and potentially dangerous fact of shootouts in several places in which more than one hundred persons have been injured. The use of armed groups and local terrorists has been reported from numerous places and the likelihood of the same thing repeating in many other places seems to us to be quite high. So one death is misleading and it can rise at any moment unless preventive measures are forthcoming immediately.

It is in this background that we suggest a greater cooperation between the government and the Election Commission. We have still not understood the reasons behind the government's stand off on the issue of the army deployment for the UP elections, especially when all the filed level officials expressed the need for the army's presence given the early tendencies in the risk-prone elections areas. Given our political climate and the track record of all ruling parties using executive position to influence the elections, the stand off on the army deployment question has definitely caused a lot of eyebrows to be raised.

In spite of the stand off the EC has been promised all sorts of assistance by the government in ensuring peaceful elections. This we want to make sure it is forthcoming. We want to underscore the point that the government is duty-bound to extend all assistance to the EC in ensuring an environment that will encourage voter to come out and vote. This is the key point: voters' participation. Our voters are usually very keen to vote, as evidenced by the high turnout in all national elections. It should be just as true for local polls if not more. But if violence increases and an atmosphere of intimidation and fear spreads then it will have a very negative affect on the elections.

So far the Elections Commission's role has been excellent and we wish it continues to perform its role with the same straightforwardness as it has done so far. It's a long election and the EC needs all the help it can get. We from the media promise all our co-operation.

## Tampering with Kahn's original plan

Let good sense prevail

BY resuming the construction of two residential units for the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker in the Sangsad Bhaban area amidst strong protests, the authorities have shown no qualms in tampering with the original landscaping by the world famous architect Louis Kahn. According to reports, additional workforce has been engaged to complete the work as early as possible. We had joined voices with various environmental and architect groups in deprecating the move when it was first exposed, and we do so again. It is totally unacceptable. As it is, open spaces, rivers and water bodies in and around the capital are already under threat from grabbers, so that construction of buildings in an important area like Sangsad Bhaban by people in authority can only send wrong signal to potential encroachers.

The fact that the previous speaker may have approved of the project did not sanctify it; for what is wrong is wrong. In the face of public outcry, the present government stopped implementing the project for sometime. Why has it changed its mind now? Their suggestion that 'Kahn had envisaged such housing units in his plan' has been totally dismissed by the experts. We would have normally opposed it as an encroachment on an ever decreasing open space, but in this case it is of far greater importance. Here we are talking about interfering with the landscape and altering aesthetic designs made by none other than famous architect Louis Kahn.

The Sangsad Bhaban complex is regarded as one of the best architectural monuments in the world and we are very proud of it. We are dismayed by the indifferent attitude shown towards the environmentalists, architects and the media by way of brushing aside their collective demand for cancellation of their project. We fail to understand why can't the authority realise that a fine monument of cultural, architectural and environmental heritage should never be allowed to lose its original alignment. We hope the authority would reevaluate the whole project and move it to some other place.

## Countdown to war in Iraq



M ABDUL HAFIZ

administration was "following a meticulously planned strategy to persuade the public, the Congress and the allies of the need to confront the threat of Saddam Hussein". Andrew H. Card, the White House chief of staff, cynically described how the administration was stepping up its war plan for the fall explaining, "From a marketing point of view... you don't introduce new products in August."

"We still believe strongly in

without a row. Thus frustrating at least one of the US designs to initiate a military action. But then President Bush can certainly use economic, political and military pressure to win a vote in the UNSC to rubber-stamp the US war plans. After all, 1991 Gulf War was fought in the name of the UN and the harsh sanctions the Iraqis have been suffering from for last 12 years had also been UN-imposed. Moreover it is more than a reality that the US

course, George W. Bush named Iraq as one of the three countries, alongside Iran and North Korea, in 'the axis of evil' confronting the United States.

In the meantime, things could not have been otherwise since the stringent discipline of a disarmament regime that the US has chosen to force upon Iraq is a little else than the preliminary manoeuvre of a plan to remap the political geography of the region. It is not surprising that

either neutralised or dismantled by the virtually uninterrupted inspection carried out until 1998. But with the US pitching in aggressively and none other than secretary of state himself declaring Iraq to be in 'material breach' of the UN resolution the countdown to war seems to have been ominously accelerated. Powell was however careful not to jump to an inference that the declaration constituted a 'casus belli' for war and had been at pains to

viewpoints on the issues but both sides seems to have entirely different stories to tell and the differences persist. This may, according to the observers, snowball into a major crisis.

While such heats are generating over the inspection by UNMOVIC, the allies are reluctant to support military action in Iraq and major report on the progress and result of weapon inspection, so far carried out, is due to be presented to the UN on 27 January, it is indeed intriguing that on January 10 the US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld signed a deployment order to send an additional 35,000 US troops in the Gulf. It will be the largest deployment since the US began a build-up of force last month for a possible invasion of Iraq. The deployment order coincided with a warning by the Secretary of State Colin Powell that the US "reserves the right, in the absence of international action to disarm Iraq, to act with like-minded nations to disarm Iraq". His comments followed an UN report saying that its inspectors had found "no smoking guns" in Iraq during their recent investigations. The report caused speculation in media that it would make it more difficult for the US to get international endorsement for military action.

Yet, following the order of the Defence Secretary, about 7000 Marines left the Port of Norfolk, Virginia aboard three ships -- the USS Saipan, the USS Ponce and the USS Gunston Hall. This brings the number of troops deployed to the Gulf region to around 80,000. The Pentagon planned to have well over 100,000 troops in the region by the end of the month, hoping to ultimately raise the figure to 2,50,000. Disregarding worldwide storm of protests against the unending catastrophe it is not for nothing that the US has been painstakingly building up this force in the wilderness of the deserts turning the Gulf once again into an Armageddon.

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

## PERSPECTIVES

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regime change in Iraq" explained Secretary of State Colin Powell whom some were mistakenly looking to as a voice of reason or moderation in the administration. After some critics questioned the Bush administration's strategy for invading Iraq, Vice President Dick Cheney said, "There is no doubt that Saddam now has weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ... There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies and against us" despite the lack of evidence for such claims. His views were echoed by Richard Boucher, the spokesman for the State Department: "The only way to really solve the problem (of Iraq) is through regime change."

However the question remains how will the US -- perhaps with Britain -- in some acceptably circumscribed role get into Iraq? One likely scenario was that Bush administration would seek to create a stand-off over sending anew the UN weapon inspectors into Iraq which however admitted them

dominates the UN, especially its Security Council. Other great powers that sit on the council have their own interests, not those of Iraqi people, in mind and they can always be roped in as was done during creating consensus on UN resolution No.1441.

Another possible scenario is that the US will succeed in manufacturing a link between Iraq and al-Qaida, even though no credible connection has yet been found. Only two days after the attack of September 11, Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defence and one of the leading voices calling for war in Iraq, said, clearly gesturing towards Iraq, "It's not simply a matter of capturing people and holding them accountable ... but also removing the sanctuaries and support system ending states (that) sponsor terrorism." In March 2002, CIA director, George Tenet told the Senate Armed Forces Committee that "Baghdad has a long history of supporting terrorism and has also had contacts with al-Qaida". And, of

shortly before the chief of the weapon inspections in Iraq, Hans Blix was due to deliver a preliminary assessment to the UNSC the US ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte announced that the declaration submitted by Iraq comprised yet another 'material breach' of the UN resolutions. Britain, followed in breathless accompaniment, dismissing the Iraqi declaration as all but worthless -- staying clear, however of the term 'material breach'. Blix for his part offered the preliminary assessment that the Iraqi declaration of over 11,000 pages detailing all relevant facts about the programme for the destruction of WMD, contained little that was not known.

The Iraqi response, though relatively subdued presumably on account of an indifferent global media, seemed to stand the test of logic: there was nothing new in the declaration since WMD

programme had been suspended following the Gulf War of 1991 and the existing stocks and facilities

emphasise that the US believed that the weapon inspection under the aegis of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) should continue. These needed however to get more aggressive with a doubling of the number of inspectors and perhaps higher priority placed on interviewing scientists known to have played a role in Iraq's WMD programme.

But despite of a smooth start the inspection is gradually bumping into areas of friction. Consequently there is scepticism, mistrust and even clash over Iraqi declaration with both sides indulging in allegation and counter allegation particularly over Iraqi purchase of large scale uranium from Africa and stocks of lethal agent Vx which had been earlier detected in some missile fragments during inspection. Iraq's newly fielded interlocutor -- a very articulate Amir-al-Saadi who has been negotiating most of the disarmament talks mandated by UN resolutions-deftly defended Iraq

diversity India represented. He was against the old bigoted religious approach.

A better way for the Congress would have been to encourage the formation of a united front of anti-Hindutva forces to fight against the demon of communalism. This front could have NGOs, eminent citizens and members of political parties who are willing to eschew politics while representing the front. There should be a one-point agenda: to fight the Hindutva forces. Politics should take a back seat in such a formation. What will also come in handy is the ideology of economic independence that Mahatma Gandhi wanted to be followed after having won political independence. Once Prime Minister Indira Gandhi swept the polls on the slogan of garibi hatao (oust poverty). It meant that people wanted a party that would help them meet their basic needs. In a country where 250 million people live in abject poverty while another 400 million barely manage to make ends meet, caste or the religious appeal can provide a sop, not the solution. Instead of tinkering with caste problems, the Congress should organise those who have no other political right except the "right to life" which is meaningless in the absence of right to food, shelter and health.

Such an approach can lessen the Hindutva appeal to the common man. The touchstone of whatever a political party does will be how far it has enabled the individual to meet his needs and rise above his petty self. Can the Congress do it?

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## Putting caste before country



KULDEEP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

WHEN political parties lose their vision, they go berserk. Winning at the polls becomes important and protecting cohesive temper of the society gets a low priority. In India, any sectional appeal is particularly dangerous because of its inherent disruptive character. We have too many fissiparous tendencies for us to take risks. Still there is little sensitivity on this point.

The BJP is the biggest culprit because it plays the Hindu card with a vengeance. It has revived communalism of the partition days after 55 years. But the Congress, having a long and great tradition, is confused.

At best, it is passive. It is yet to take in right earnest the cudgels against those who are spreading hatred and, in the process, harming the country. It is compromising the standards that Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru set before the country when they led the independence movement. Their idealism, sustained for several decades, has disappeared from the party. It seems that it would rather wear the light clothes of caste and Hindutva than the sturdy robe of secularism. Making Sushil Kumar Shinde Maharashtra chief minister was meant to placate the backward community to which Shinde

belongs. Rajasthan, too, the Congress will probably use the caste factor to counter the Hindutva propaganda. The Congress has lost three by-elections in the state to the BJP. To cap it all, there was the rout in Gujarat. True, caste transcends religion because the discrimination practised is not only against the lowly Hindus but also against the Muslims. It is the social division that strings them together. Religion, on the other hand, divides them community-wise. It has been seen both

strength in the state assemblies and parliament has been increasing election after election. No doubt, the society has got more polarised than before. But that is precisely what the BJP wants so as to ensure that the majority -- the Hindus -- is arrayed against the minorities. It helps the party to divide the society into black and white, lessening the grey area, which is the togetherness represents. Probably the BJP would not have come out in the open to play the Hindu card so soon. Prime

the enormous money the party collected. The difference between then and now is that the BJP is more defensive.

The mistake of the Congress is that it wants to take recourse to caste combinations when it should be refurbishing its own glorious policy of Hindu-Muslim unity. The party has before it the proud example of freedom struggle to follow.

The Hindus and the Muslims, the upper castes and lower castes and the teeming millions rising above

least in the Hindi-speaking states. The Congress thinking was wrong. It should have stuck to its ideology of pluralism. It can still rectify the mistake.

The party does not have to become desperate to stall the BJP. Hindutva has to be fought not by depending on caste but by re-enumerating the party's faith in secularism, the country's ethos. The Congress should never try to go away from it even if it can make temporary gains. The basic thing is

## BETWEEN THE LINES

In fact, the Congress started sliding down when it began to align itself with the religious and caste forces for election purposes... The party does not have to become desperate to stall the BJP. Hindutva has to be fought not by depending on caste but by re-enumerating the party's faith in secularism, the country's ethos. The Congress should never try to go away from it even if it can make temporary gains. The basic thing is that wrong means will not lead to right results. One unhappily watched Sonia Gandhi embarking on her election campaign in Gujarat after visiting a temple. Soft Hindutva, the thesis that some Congressmen are propounding, is only a pale carbon copy of the BJP's philosophy. The Congress saw that it did not work in Gujarat.

It is clear in its mind about Hindutva. It blames the minorities, particularly the Muslims, for all the economic and cultural deficiencies in the country. It wants to replicate the Gujarat experiment. That means it will continue to incite the Hindus in the name of religion, spread hatred against the Muslims and cash in on all these during elections if people buy the BJP's line. It is no surprise because the party has been articulating the Hindu line since its inception in 1979. It has seen the communal approach paying dividends. Its

Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, when in the opposition, publicly said that they had to pick up the kamandal (a vessel Sadus carry) to counter "the Mandal." He was referring to L K Advani's Rath Yatra through northern India to "fight" against the forces which reservations for the backward had "unleashed." The BJP thought it had no option except to use the Hindu sentiment to gather support. This was a wrong inference because the Mandal was a political weapon employed to stabilise the tottering V P Singh government. However, Advani's yatra, which sparked off anti-Muslim murderous riots, hit the jackpot for the BJP, both in terms of Hindu consolidation and

caste and creed had come together at that time. The Congress then appealed to the people to rise above religious and caste prejudices. That worked. Why shouldn't it now? Instead of blaming the BJP for communalising the polity, the Congress is diluting the ideological war against obscurantism. It is too mute, too inactive to be seriously taken. In fact, the Congress started sliding down when it began to align itself with the religious and caste forces for election purposes. To its dismay, it found that however stringent it became in its tone it could not match the high-pitched fanatics and rabble-rousers. They had the ear of the dalits and the extremist Hindus at

that wrong means will not lead to right results. One unhappily watched Sonia Gandhi embarking on her election campaign in Gujarat after visiting a temple. Soft Hindutva, the thesis that some Congressmen are propounding, is only a pale carbon copy of the BJP's philosophy. The Congress saw that it did not work in Gujarat.

The Congress should never lose sight of the fact that it stands for the values that are not acceptable to the BJP and the other members of the Sangh parivar. The BJP had Vir Savarkar as its leader. His call was:

"Hindutva is not a word but history." The leader of the Congress was Nehru who saw unity in the

## Koizumi's shrine visit hampers joint effort to defuse North Korean crisis

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

FOR the third time in less than two years Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo to pay respect to country's war victims. The third visit on January 14 raised a number of new questions surrounding the rationale of such visits and sparked sharp criticisms from China and South Korea, not to mention that of the northern part of Korean peninsula for whose leadership the visit might have provided further evidence that Japan is not sincere at all in her effort to restore peace in East Asia.

Critics see Yasukuni Shrine as a symbol of Japan's past militarist regime that led the country into war with its Asian neighbours. The shrine is dedicated to Japan's 2.5 million war-dead, including a number of leading wartime political figures convicted and sentenced for war crimes by the Tokyo International Tribunal. And it is this second group of Japan's "war victims" that all controversy surrounding Yasukuni is centered on.

The third visit at a time considered by many as crucial for Japan as the country is actively involved in the process of defusing tensions in the Korean peninsula resulting from North Korea's nuclear stand-off. As expected, both China and

expected from political figures whose decisions have far reaching effect on sensitive political issues.

The latest visit once again was apparently timed to minimise criticisms from victims of Japanese aggression before and during World

South Korea reacted immediately and termed the visit as an irrational act. Officials of both countries said they could not understand why Koizumi felt the need to pay homage at a place that Japan's neighbours see as a symbol of country's milita-

rially. A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman made it clear that the act would undermine the political base of China-Japan relations and hurt the feelings of the people of Asian countries, including China, Kim Hang Kyung, South Korea's vice minister of foreign affairs and trade summoned the minister of the Japanese embassy in Seoul to protest Koizumi's shrine visit.

It is not only Japan's neighbours who were puzzled by the visit. Even in Tokyo, the foreign ministry with her South Korean counterpart and also with President Kim Dae Jung. The South Korean side abruptly cancelled the meeting between President Kim and the visiting Japanese foreign minister. Although Kawaguchi's meeting with Choi Sung Hong, minister of foreign affairs and trade, was held as scheduled, she had to spend much of the time trying to defend the actions of the prime minister. Choi made it clear to Kawaguchi that Yasukuni was becoming a burden

on South Korea-Japan relations. The apparently sharp reactions expressed by Japan's neighbours also give clear indication that the Yasukuni visit would most likely hurt Koizumi's plans for a cooperative approach in handling North Korea's

marked the thirtieth anniversary of normalization of Japan-China relations and Koizumi was supposed to visit the country to talk with Chinese leadership. But that visit has been postponed and with his new Yasukuni trip the Japanese prime minister probably has further deferred any of his planned future visit to China. This obviously is not a good sign for Japanese diplomacy. People in Japan are talking about internal political motives behind the latest Yasukuni visit of the prime minister. By going to the shrine Koizumi was probably willing to give signals to the rightist camp of his ruling Liberal Democratic Party of his own political position. This might turn out to be vital to retain his position, as the party is to make choice of its leadership in September. But by taking into consideration of personal political benefits, Koizumi might have compelled the country to sacrifice much of the diplomatic gains it made recently in the process of normalising relations with all her neighbours, including North Korea.

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Japanese envoy at this stage. Both China and South Korea expressed their dissatisfaction in the past over the apparent low interest among Japanese officials in dealing with historical issues in their talks with Pyongyang. North Korea has always