

## Some JS committees at last

Tokenism will be self-defeating

After 18 months of indifference to the formation of parliamentary standing committees which ought to have automatically come into being following the inaugural session of the 8<sup>th</sup> parliament, 11 out of 45 such bodies have been constituted day before yesterday. The sense of relief that should have been evoked by the news is, however, missing. First of all, these committees, five of which are specifically on ministries, the rest being of composite nature, have been constituted in a unilateral manner giving rise to an opposition allegation that they were not consulted. The ruling party has kept in reserve for the main opposition party Awami League two slots in each ten-member body and three in a fifteen-member one. This would more or less be a representation proportional to the AL's strength in parliament. Significantly though, no slot of chairmanship has been given to the Awami League. Our view on the subject has been that the ruling party should go the extra mile to offer chairmanship of some important committees, like the public accounts committee for one, to the opposition.

It is regrettable that even as a matter of form, the JS secretariat did not circulate the agenda on formation of parliamentary standing committees to all MPs. The opposition has termed the government's constitution of the standing committees as 'undemocratic'; but it is not without significance that their latest boycott of parliament had ensued when the committees were being formed. Understandably, some three years ago during the AL rule, a consensus was reached on proportional representation to standing committees in a joint meeting of the two sides under the auspices of the UNDP's programme for strengthening the parliament.

The parliamentary committees are the rock-bed of a transparent, answerable and accountable system of democratic government. They act as oversight bodies and also help in the law-making by scrutinising various bills. However, since the committees decide by majority on issues, the ruling party has a natural safeguard there. Moreover, the committee decisions are not binding on the ministries, these are recommendatory. All this is reason why the ruling party should be generous and extra-accommodative to the opposition's demands for berth in the committees.

## Resignation by Clare Short

Exposing frailty of Iraq rebuilding effort

WETHER the resignation by Clare Short, British Development Secretary would be a big blow to Tony Blair's leadership or not, there is no doubt that his Labour party is facing a big ideological crisis. Labour has only recently faced some setbacks in local elections, but Ms Short's accusation of breaking promises about involving the United Nations in running Iraq very clearly demonstrates that there is something more than meets the eye. Earlier Blair was able to convince Ms Short not to resign from his cabinet last March after an equally serious threat over the cause of invading Iraq. It was indeed a bit strange that when a senior leader like Robin Cook actually took the bold step, she reconciled.

Ms Short may have failed then to act upon her threat, but now she has come up with even more serious allegations against Tony Blair and Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary. She claims that both of them have had secretly negotiated with the UN Security Council about the legality of the occupation forces and the need for a UN role in establishing a legitimate Iraqi government. What's so unusual about this latest allegations is that if Ms Short could compromise on the basic causes of the invasion without UN intervention, then why could she not compromise on the future role of the occupation forces in Iraq? Whatever the reasons might be for that, but Blair's spokesperson has already rejected that she was not given any assurances about the legality of the war or the reconstruction efforts, that had not been fulfilled. That explains the state of frailty the rebuilding effort is in at the moment.

The voice of dissent over the reconstruction effort is visibly clear which obviously raises grave concern about the viability of the work to be done. On one hand, the rift between the most important British official in the rebuilding work and the government gets exposed in public, on the other the rift between Pentagon and White House becomes clear over the change of chief administrator of future Iraq. We can simply hope, even if it's in vain, that in this game of power play and uncertainty, the interests and safety of the Iraqi people would be at the forefront of all future plans and not be compromised.

## To win war is easy but peace is difficult in Afghanistan



HARUN UR RASHID

Uzbeks the central north. The Baluch squeeze into south-west and the Turkoman are in north-west.

This ethnic mix coupled with suspicion on each other complicates attempts to form an effective national government in Afghanistan. Furthermore there is an external consideration here. All of these ethnic groups with the exception of the Hazaras (they are

regrouped under Mullah Mohammad Umar with plan to attack US-led coalition troops with vigour and ferocity.

Maki Shinohara, an official with UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said that the killing sent a shockwave through the NGO community and forced a reappraisal of activities in central and southern Afghanistan. People returning to Afghanistan need

transition to democratic national government and consolidation of Kabul authority. Attempts to build a 70,000 strong national army to attack the Taliban and the warlords appear shaky. To compound the situation, the Defence Minister Mohammad Fahim, a Tajik, has reportedly a fractious relationship with Karzai. Afghan national army graduates refuse to go to areas such as Gardez in Paktia province where

There are no jobs, schools are in a state of disrepair and health services non-existent."

Afghanistan's strategic location is unique in the region. It is where South Asian countries, Central Asian nations, Iran and China come together. So developments in these countries can have an effect on Afghanistan and developments in Afghanistan can spill over into these countries.

Afghanistan's geopolitical location makes it the receiver and transmitter of political and religious trends in the region. Iran and Russia remain deeply suspicious of US involvement in Afghanistan. They think that the long-term goal of the US has been to establish its dominance over the oil wells of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. The presence of the US in Iraq has confirmed this aim. The uneasiness in Iran and Russia of the presence of the US in the region has an effect on Afghanistan because politically it means that any stability in Afghanistan must have blessings from Tehran and Moscow.

The US now realises that reforms cannot take place soon in Afghanistan. Generations of nursed-hatred against each other of the ethnic groups would produce instability without a strong military presence to keep things calm. Warlords are difficult to handle because of support from their kinship outside borders.

War can get rid of regimes but to rebuild a nation of diverse groups is very hard. The US has confronted a stark reality that it is easy to win a war but to restore peace is difficult. More so when Washington is no more welcome in Afghanistan than was Moscow in 1979.

The limits to US power in Afghanistan are now visible. The question today is when and how the US will acknowledge this reality.

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RAQ war has almost eclipsed news in the media about Afghanistan. The Taliban government was toppled 18 months ago but peace in Afghanistan is distant yet. Jean-Paul Sartre once said, "When the rich wage war, it is the poor who die" and among those who manage to survive, he might have added, thousands suffer and are displaced. The people in Afghanistan have not enjoyed peace since 1979.

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Mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has been hooked on a culture of violence, power and self-interest. In recent days a witness said that the Taliban stopped and searched the Red Cross convoy and selected a westerner to send a message to the NGO community that it is no longer safe for them to operate beyond Kabul. An Italian was killed sometime ago near Zabol and the killing was followed by a warning from Mullah Dadullah, a hardliner that the Taliban had

Shi'ites and have religious links with Iran) have direct ethnic kinship links beyond Afghanistan's borders. Therefore relations between Afghanistan and its neighbours -- Pakistan, China, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan -- are far more than just political. They are also to a greater or lesser extent driven by domestic political considerations.

The B-52s and a fighting force of 11,500 allied troops are expected to keep a lid on the Taliban, the remnants of Al-Qaeda, errant warlords who still control vast areas of north and south of Afghanistan.

Various ethnic zones. The Pashtuns are the dominant group - about half of the population. Then come the three big minorities, the Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks. After them come a host of smaller groups such as Baluch and the Turkoman. These groups speak different languages and there is no national language. All the distinct ethnic groups have homelands of their own. The Pashtuns have the south of the country, the Hazaras its mountainous central knot, the Tajiks the north-east and the

more than tents. They need schools, medical services, and advice on how to cultivate the land. But this is becoming difficult because the incidents of fighting and killing indicate that the Taliban are becoming more active.

Force headquarters in Kabul. Miraculously nobody was killed. Each week the death toll creeps up as the low-intensity conflict continues in the country.

The chronic absence of security outside Kabul remains an obstacle to economic growth, the nation's

they could be involved in fighting with the Taliban supporters. All this makes Karzai's plan to decommission the regional militias numbering about 100,000 unworkable.

Despite injections of international aid, not one major construction project has reportedly been completed. Work on the Kandahar to Kabul highway has been very slow and out of 1100 kilometres, 500 are likely to be completed by next year. Criticism and disillusionment with the Karzai government continue to spread. Burhanuddin Rabani, the former President who heads the Jamiat-e-Islami party and plans to run for President in 2004 says that no progress will be achieved until Afghanistan has a strong central government that can establish democracy at any time soon. Outside Kabul nothing has changed.

Professor Faizullah Jalal, the director of international law at Kabul University reportedly said that "the government of Karzai had lost its way and doubted the country would be ready to move to democracy at any time soon. Outside Kabul nothing has changed.

President Bush is in a way like President Truman. Straight talking, single-minded, and resolute, Truman did not hesitate to threaten Soviet Russia to withdraw from parts of Iran. Or else, he threatened 'I am going to drop that goddam thing over you'. The Soviets blinked. But Truman had a global vision and the wisdom to act on it. He was a provider for American friends, cared about Trans-Atlantic and global alliance against communism. The ideology of free world mattered with him. He never pushed America's friends to fences. President G.W. Bush looks far from being a Truman on these grounds. America's friendly ties with traditional allies are strained. It has deteriorated to an extent where Colin Powell is speaking of grave consequences for France. Indeed, friends and foes keep changing. Colin Powell's irate statement could have been appropriate had America won new friends of comparable standing. Rather, it has made foes of friends, without winning over its detractors.

Pakistan has precarious position as an obliging nation. The Republicans have a tradition of tilting towards Pakistan. It is working very hard in protecting its ties with America as an obliging nation. Pakistan's porous border with Afghanistan has the most difficult terrain. These are the hideouts for the Muslim militant organisations.

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America need not take pains over it, so long the world is submitting to its might. It is however banal when might is only feared, but not held in regard. Such circumstances do not serve the honour of America. Great countries are great because their might is lionised by the fairness and the discretion of their action. The road map may enforce submission, but may fail to build a durable and just peace in the Middle East.



## Road map rolls over Middle East

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

EVERY administration bears the mark of its leader. The leader either by his policies or by his personal style makes it his own legacy. This is true of both constitutionally elected leaders and brutal dictators. Saddam's Iraq was his own creation. So is post-Clintonian America, strongly molded by the combative personality of its President, G.W. Bush. It is natural. History, in fact, is the biography of the leaders. The world is a beholder of President Bush's attitude and beliefs in the resolute actions of America. Every President is however judged by the standard set by the Presidents who ruled America in the past. After Rutherford B. Hayes and Benjamin Harrison, US Presidents of 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is another President who lost on popular vote, but won on Electoral College counts.

The personal vindication was lacking in his assumption of office. He was rightly deficient in the beginning about assertively thrusting his personality. Nine/eleven changed everything. The carnage unencumbered him. He came out in his elements and came smoking. The world has seen the last of a low-key and circumspect G.W. Bush. After the high-tech war in Iraq, the world is hearing much about Road Map from the Bush administration. I tend to think that the necessity of the road map was felt after the Twin Tower attack. The economy has always been the bane of the Bushes. It is the economy that doomed the second term bid of Senior Bush. However, unlike the son, the father followed the path of consensus in conducting Gulf War 1. My assumption is that the younger Bush may not have the flair or the depth for the academics or the intricacies of the economy. It released him from being tied down in a vexatious duty of spurring on the unwilling horse -- the recession hit American economy.

A far greater duty of hunting down America's enemies now demands his leadership. Besides, who can ignore the logic that the economy takes a down turn after a long boom. Sadly though, the boom occurred during Clinton's

eight years. The President is now on a mission of permanently ridging America of the fear of terrorist attack. I assume the psychology is like this, 'Let no evil dare to harm America as long as there is a world'. The countries from where they rise, or the countries that harbour or shelter them, are to be permanently tethered to the might of America.

That is what I read from his words and actions. Therefore, President Bush's Road Map is set to roll heavily over the Middle Eastern and Muslim countries. A miscarriage of history has brought this misery on them. Their woes started in Palestine and with the creation of the State of Israel. The misfortune is partly of their own making, an offspring of the error of judgment. Bad governance has only perpetuated the Arab world's collusion with the British against the

violation of UN resolution offers the moral ground for a military campaign and occupation of a country, then the State of Israel would have been chastised long ago to meet compliance for the violation of at least 60 UN resolutions. The road map would have rolled over Tel Aviv. But Ariel Sharon is remaining haughtily impervious to human pleas of treating the lives and the properties of the Palestinians with respect. He is collecting the toll of unremitting vengeance by cruelly pursuing murderous reprisals against innocent Palestinians. The consequences are tragic, where innocent life is not respected. Protest finds expression in the desperate acts of suicide bombings. The road map is not rolling over Israel. It rolled over Saddam's regime, and that is not all, it flattened Iraq. The country lies devastated, destroyed. A once prosperous country with a per capita

income of 7,000.00 US Dollar has been pauperized. I watch with interest the coalition forces' expression of dismay over the poverty of Iraq. It is indeed deeply saddening. But half-truths do not tell all the fact. Twelve years of UN sanctions tells the other half of the truth. Saddam was not touched; rather the sanctions pushed the Iraqis to poverty.

The road map, I presume, can turn in any direction, towards any country, which is seen as threat to Israel and looks like a breeding ground of terrorists. Now that the US troops have been pulled out of Saudi Arabia, it will come under greater scrutiny. Its funding of Islamic organisations is a suitable probing ground for America. The Saudis would be doing well to conduct their patronage watchfully. The coalition forces would not need far-fetched pretext to observe that terrorist activities in Palestine draw sustenance from the Saudis. For that matter, the brain and the fervour behind

that Bashar will listen more keenly to Abdullah of Jordan and to Turkey in trying to save his regime.

Iran is the most unwieldy road block for the coalition road map. It has an ethnic homogeneity of overwhelmingly Shiite Iranian population. The democratic structure is emerging stronger with regularly held elections. Besides, the cleric rulers are not oppressive, nor are they lavishly corrupt. Iran, at the same time, is economically growing stronger, with trading partners in European countries, China and India. Most of all, unlike the hotheaded Mullahs of Afghanistan, the Iran of Ayatollahs much disapprove in conducting their affairs. They also have a good record of not meddling in the problems of its neighbours. Peace and time will further strengthen Iran. Besides, it is advancing technologically and can ultimately become capable of attaining potent military weapons. This is not compatible with the objective of the road map. A weak

America's toleration of its nuclear and other weapons programme will depend on how hard and sincerely Pakistan tries to police the border and flush out the terrorists.

Pakistan's madrassas are the traditional breeding ground of Muslim militants. This is not to America's liking. Pakistan has to sanitise the madrassas. The most alarming thing for Pakistan is that, a single person, Pervez Musharraf, marshals its sincere anti-terrorist activities. After him the deluge may come. Things may radically go against Pakistan.

The situation in Afghanistan is not inspiring. Hamid Karzai's authority does not go beyond Kabul. Minority Tajiks control the administration. The Pashtuns are grumbling. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is back to fan the tribal animosities. Pakistan will have a hard task to contend with. Failure will have a heavy price. The road map is well focussed on Pakistan.

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## OPINION

## In response to 'a diplomat's letter'

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

T HIS refers to "A diplomat's letter" published in The Daily Star on 7-5-2003. It is quite logical for a diplomat to reflect the position of the government he represents. The British High Commissioner wrote that Saddam Hussein did not disarm rather continued to build up his military and security arsenal during the last 12 years. But this is a myth as has been reflected in the reports by UN Chief Weapons Inspector Hans Blix and EL Baradei, Director General, International Atomic Energy Agency placed in the Security Council in March. Some of the American and British intelligence reports proved to be fabricated and a travesty of truth. Lawmakers in the Congress in Washington and the House of Commons in London raised questions about the authenticity of such intelligence reports and sought thorough enquiry into presenting such false information to the world body. Robert Fish in a commentary to the *Independent* newspaper in

UK wrote, 'Fantasies and illusions were given credibility by a kind of superpower moral overrule'. Till the end of aggression by coalition forces led by the United States not a single biological or chemical weapon was fired by Iraqi regime in self-defence, while it received thousands of missiles and bombs. In this connection, I would like to quote from an article by Scott Ritter, a former UN Chief Inspector, who said that "the fact that these protective suits were not needed by coalition forces is a cause for celebration. But the total lack of chemical weapons on the battlefield, combined with the inability of the coalition, to date, to uncover any of the massive stockpiles of prohibited weapons or weapons-manufacturing capability, raises disturbing questions about what was supposed to be the main justification for the American-led military action: Disarming a recalcitrant dictator."

Let us see what kind of weapons the United States and Great Britain used against defenceless Iraqi population during aggression. The Daisy Cutter is a conventional