

Combating corruption

Sectoral reforms hold the key

WORLD Bank Vice President for South Asia Meiko Nishimizu has said faster reforms in certain key areas will help curb corruption. She has also pointed out that formation of an independent anti-corruption commission alone will not be enough to fight the malaise, without question the biggest hurdle in the way of progress and good governance.

Corruption has been gobbling up a major portion of our resources and making it extremely difficult to effect a breakthrough in important sectors having a direct bearing on national development. Essentially, these are also the areas in which corruption is both entrenched and widespread. The anti-corruption commission will be in a position to deal mainly with the complaints of corruption, but it cannot possibly wipe out the ingrained corruption, which has in some cases become almost a part of the system. So, the primary emphasis should be on pushing forward the reform plan in critical areas like education, health, power, energy, banking etc. Poor service delivery by these sectors directly affects the lives of average people. Obviously, similar reform plans should be implemented to modernise police, as other sectors cannot perform well unless the law and order situation improves.

The World Bank vice president thinks that the proposed anti-corruption commission might be able to net the 'big fish,' but it will not have the same effect on malpractices occurring on a daily basis in different areas of the public's life and living.

As for corruption of the day-to-day type, it may not be possible to change things overnight. Fundamental reforms are needed to attain our objective in this area. However, if the government can rein in the corrupt men holding high positions, it will have a positive impact on society as a whole and will also send a danger signal to the corrupt government officials and all others concerned.

The call to launch a direct assault on corruption is not coming for the first time from the development partners, but the response to it has not so far been very effective. We should not, however, forget that it is a problem that must be solved in our best interest, not just to make an impression on the development partners.

Defying court order?

Someone in authority should apply brake

THE news of work continuing on the housing project for Speaker and Deputy Speaker at the Sangsad Bhaban premises, despite a stay order from the High Court, only goes to show how the vested quarters are hell-bent on pursuing their agenda. The High Court issued a *rule nisi* asking the government to explain why the construction project should not be declared illegal, violating related laws on the subject. But it seems a nexus between contractors and works directorate engineers or officials is working to defy court order. Reportedly fifty per cent of the work has already been completed. Even earlier the works ministry paid little heed to the protests by environmentalists and architects that tampering with the original design of the world famous architect Louis Kahn was not acceptable either environmentally or architecturally.

The Sangsad Bhaban complex is regarded as one of the best architectural monuments in the world and without doubt it is a possession we prize most. We are distraught of the indifferent attitude to the concerns of environmentalists, architects and now the judiciary. The project was approved by the previous speaker provoking an instant outcry. Though the present government had taken a pause in the face of protests at one stage, it seems to have now relented to the wiles of vested quarters. Some even came up with an unbelievable suggestion that 'Kahn had envisaged such housing units in his plan,' which quite expectedly was dismissed by the experts. Interfering with the landscape and altering aesthetic designs by none other than famous architect Louis Kahn can be called nothing less than sinful.

We have always protested encroachment on open spaces, rivers and water bodies in and around the capital. Now this sort of defiant move to construct new buildings in an exclusive area like Sangsad Bhaban premises will only encourage land grabbing at other levels. We hope the authorities would take the necessary steps to ensure that a precious cultural, architectural and environmental heritage does not get damaged.

BILLY AHMED

WITH the war in Iraq over, the question that haunts the world is whether Bush administration will be successful to establish a true democratic system in Iraq as a model for the entire Middle East as envisaged or will it boomerang like the 1955 Baghdad Pact. The failure of which heralded the end of British influence. To rebuild democracy is an uphill task. US should take lesson from the Baghdad Pact. Briefly the Baghdad Pact, as it is known was formulated in 1955 by Britain, Iraq, Turkey and Pakistan with the objective of bolstering regional defence and preventing the infiltration of the Soviet Union into the Middle East. In a hope to materialise this pact Britain needed Syria and Jordan in its camp to complete the umbrella plan of the Middle East. Instead it faced

a strong Arab opposition, encouraged by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in fiery rhetoric broadcast from the Voice of the Arabs radio in Cairo. Syria refused to join, while the young anglophile King Hussein of Jordan wavered, but had to withdraw owing to uprising of Jordanian people denouncing the pact. And that was the end of the ambitious British plan to rope in the Middle East under its influence.

The world today is different so are the Iraqis. An Iraqi opposition, has condemned the idea of an interim US military government in Baghdad as an insult to the country's sovereignty. However, the Bush administration may need to take into account what is prevailing over the past 50 years: irrepressible Arab opposition to what is regarded as unwanted and unacceptable interference in the affairs of the Middle East. Instead it faced

Water and woes!



ABDUL BAYES

NOT many years back perhaps, people of Bangladesh, hardly thought of paying a price for the use of water. Of course, they had always been cautioned by the adage: *Panir opor nam jibon* (life is the other name of water). I suspect -- with due apology -- whether even economists could seriously foresee that water would become such a scarce commodity to claim a price for its use. I recall the days at college when my economics teachers used to say that the supply of water -- especially of rivers and seas -- far exceeded the demand and hence fetched no price! Few years later, I learnt that urban dwellers have to pay a price for water since the supply does not match demand and in fact, there is a cost in supplying water to them. Rural people, especially in developing countries, reportedly, do not have to pay -- and they never had to -- as the water is abundant there and the supply does not involve any cost whatsoever.

Golden days gone!

Once perhaps, those "golden" days. With the passage of time, the advent of irrigation-led modern technologies in agriculture put people to wait wearily for water in rural areas. The demand for water with the burgeoning growth of Modern Varieties (MVs) of rice began to far exceed the supply. Quite obviously, excess demand for water claimed a price and the cost of water has been rising with the rise in demand. The so-called abundant input soon turned out to be one of the scarcest of all times. If we could stretch our imagination to, say 2025, relating to the demand and supply of water, we could possibly get a hint about the heightened havoc that await all of us in the years to come.

I just completed reading a book: *World Water and Food to 2025 - Dealing with Scarcity*. (Thanks to the IFPRI chief, Joachim von Braun for gifting it). The book is written by M.W. Rosegrant, Ximing Cai and Sarah A. Cline and published by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 2000. A glance through the book just seems

to warn us about the paucity of water in the offing and the price that have to be paid if policy prescriptions are not properly propelled.

Subsidising the strong!

Despite growing scarcity and wasteful uses, water is not generally treated as scarce commodity in many countries where both domestic and irrigation water users are substantially subsidised. Contrary to the stated equity goals, subsidies tend to worsen rather than

per cent between 1995 and 2025 and in developing countries 65 per cent... And calorie requirement and dietary trends will translate to even greater water demand if the food produced is to supply the adequate nutrition."

While the booz has been on board, the bane remained behind the curtain. It is being alleged that inappropriate management of water resulted in environmental problems including excessive water depletion, water quality reduction, water logging and

non for the preservation of a healthy life. The authors go to argue that unsafe drinking water combined with poor household and community sanitary conditions remain as major contribution to disease and malnutrition, particularly among children. The poor water quality and sanitation conditions contribute to the approximately 4 billion cases of diarrhoea each year which lead to 2 million deaths, mostly among the children under the age of five.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

World water that has been running from abundance to scarcity could cause woes for all of us. An appropriate mix of water policy, reform, research, investment and institutions should be tailored to economise on the use of water in the years to come. Otherwise, not only food security, even human survival could be at stake. The sooner we realise the gravity of the situation, the better the world is placed for a good living.

improve equity. In most countries, water subsidies go disproportionately to the better off -- so argued the authors. "At the national level, for example, the richest 20 per cent get about twice the amount of subsidised water as the poorest 20 per cent get in Ghana, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. This results in poor people spending proportionately up to three times as much on water bills as the rich spend." To improve efficiency and equity, water prices in urban areas could be increased to meet costs of delivery and generate revenues. However, targeted subsidy could continue.

Boon and bane

It is well known that water development is critical for food security and hence for agriculture. We are told that today's world has 250 million hectares irrigated area -- nearly five times the amount existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Irrigation has been vital to food security and sustainable livelihoods especially in developing countries during the green revolution. Bangladesh is an enlightening example where the irrigation-led technologies enabled the country to double its food production as well as reduce the dependence on food imports. Using 1995 data as the base line, the authors of the book tell us that about four-fifths of the total water use was claimed by irrigated agriculture. "By 2025, global population is likely to increase to 7.9 billion, more than 80 per cent will live in developing countries and 58 per cent in rapidly growing urban areas. In response to population growth and rising incomes, worldwide cereal demand will grow by projected 46

salinisation. One FAO report in 1996 is reported to have estimated that on a global scale, there are about 20-30 million hectares of irrigated lands severely affected by salinity. An additional 60-80 million hectares are affected to some extent by both water logging and salinity.

However, in addition to irrigation water, water is also used for drinking and industrial purposes. Although these two types of use account for one-fifth of the total demand, the growth in their uses has been phenomenal over the years. Globally withdrawal for domestic and industrial use have been four-fold between 1950 and 1995 compared to a doubling for agricultural purposes. Needless to mention perhaps that a supply of safe drinking water is a *sine qua*

invade the aquifers, leading to a collapse of crops. At the same time, in a number of regions in India water tables have been falling at average rates of two to three meters per year as the number of irrigation wells grows. It is forecast that one-fourth of India's harvest could be at risk in coming years if situation continues to grow like this. On the other hand, according to the World Resource Institute (WRI, 2000), around 66 per cent of agricultural land has been degraded to varying degrees by erosion, salinisation, compaction, nutrient depletion or pollution over the 50 years. Poor policies and inappropriate incentives for intensification of agriculture have been major contributors to degradation.

Killing the goose?

Few facts and figures from the book would finger at the way the world is, as if killing the goose that seemingly lay golden eggs. Ground water is depleted when pumping

rates exceed the rate of natural recharge. There are clear indications of overdraining or mining of ground water. If the overdrain is higher than recharge, it increases pumping lifts, and costs from lowered water tables, cause land to subside and induce saline intrusion and other degradation of water quality in aquifer. Some examples from the book should be cited. In parts of north China plain, ground water levels are falling by as much as one meter per year. In the west Indian State of Gujarat, overpumping caused salt water to

irrigation scheduling systems and improved equipment maintenance. Institutional improvements may involve effective water user associations and water rights, the introduction of water pricing and improvements in the legal environment of water allocation."

Another option, quite relevant to Bangladeshi agriculture, I suppose, is harvesting rain water to face rainy days. Rainfed agriculture still accounts for 60 per cent of total cereal production in the whole world. A "Business As Usual" (BAU) estimate shows that rainfed agriculture will continue to play an important role in cereal production, contributing half the total increase of cereal production between 1995 and 2025. If that is so, improved water management and crop productivity in rain fed areas might relieve considerable pressure on irrigated agriculture and on water resources. This would hinge, however, on increased allocation to research and technology in those areas. "Higher priority for agricultural extension services and access to markets, credit and input supplies should be given in rainfed areas because successful development of rainfed areas is likely to be more complex than in high-potential irrigated areas given their relative lack of access to infrastructure and markets and their more difficult and variable agroclimatic environments..."

Investment in rainfed areas, policy reform, and transfer of technology, such as water harvesting, will therefore require strong partnership agricultural researchers and other agents of change, including local organisations, farmers, community leaders, NGOs, national policy makers and donors."

Meaningful Messages

The book by W.M. Rosegrant and others is thus a story of world water that has been running from abundance to scarcity and could cause woes for all of us. An appropriate mix of water policy, reform, research, investment and institutions should be tailored to economise on the use of water in the years to come. Otherwise, not only food security, even human survival could be at stake. The sooner we realise the gravity of the situation, the better the world is placed for a good living. There might be water everywhere but not a drop to drink. Let not the 'green' be allowed to make us groan.

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Iraq war has put humanity at stake

AM ABDUS SATTAR

AFTER the break-up of the USSR (Soviet Union) the world was being controlled by the only other superpower -- the United States of America. But the naked aggression against Iraq without caring for the United Nations by the US, supported by a few allies, mainly the UK, despite of the popular outburst of Britons protesting over-whelmingly against the invasion of Iraq, has left the US a body clinically dead as a political organisation. What does then await the future of this planet? Is civilisation safe in such a unipolar world? The future seems to be very dark for mankind and civilisation.

President George W Bush has been put in the Oval Office by the conservative US Supreme Court. The losing candidate Al Gore, though strongly disagreed with the verdict of the Supreme Court, accepted the verdict. Commentators said that, had it been any third world country, there would have been tanks on the streets.

It is said that the plan for invading Iraq was drawn up long before the election. What is the reason d'etre for the invasion of Iraq? The most important ones seem to be (a) the Iraqi oil and (b) the establishment of Israel more firmly as the regional superpower to act as proxy of the US in the region. Saudi Arabia was US's most faithful ally in the Arab world. But in the war against Iraq Saudi Arabia did not have any useful to it. Hence this

and further because the delay in implementing the US decision could be costly which would spark off sharp reaction inside his country. So President George W. Bush had to act promptly.

What is the law supporting Bush in waging this war? The UN Charter did not make any provision anywhere allowing any country or group of countries to invade an independent and sovereign country for alleged breach of human

peace, breaches of peace and acts of aggression. Article 39 of that Chapter provides that "The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security". Article 41 provides that "The Security

such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations".

So whatever power has been given in Chapter VII of the Charter, it has been given to the Security Council except the inherent power of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations until the

Weapons however dreadful and destructive cannot conquer the human spirit. History has it that no power on earth could permanently hold its sway over peoples of the world at different times in different places. Every cloud has a silver lining. The three European powers -- Russia, France and Germany -- met recently at St. Petersburg. The poverty-stricken North Korea's intransigence also is obviously with China's covert support. Obviously a rival 'pole' is building up.

war.

Israel is the only dependable ally of the US in the region. All kinds of weapons of mass destruction have been supplied to it by the US. The only atomic reactor that was being built up by Iraq near Baghdad was destroyed by the Israeli planes on June 7, 1981.

The excuse put forward by the US for its aggression against Iraq was that it possessed weapons of mass destruction. Though the weapons inspectors could not discover any weapon of mass destruction or any sign of atomic weapon and they wanted more time to continue the search, the US was unwilling to allow any time. Because time was running out fast since the hot season was setting in

rights and restoration of democracy.

Article 2.1 of the Charter of the United Nations provides that "the Organisation is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members". Article 2.7 provides that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorise the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter but this Principle shall not preclude the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII".

Chapter VII of the Charter deals with action in respect to threats to

Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraph, radio and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations". And Article 42 provides that "Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and

Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security as provided in Article 51 of the said Chapter VII of the Charter.

Now George W. Bush's "Doctrine of Pre-emptive Strike" has no place in the UN Charter. The US-led invasion of Iraq is therefore clearly an act of aggression under the international law. Bush and his coalition have thus committed war crime and are liable to be tried as such for killing innocent men, women and children of Iraq, besides committing other crimes of destroying the cradle of civilisation, allowing the looting of invaluable relics in different museums of Baghdad and burning of invaluable books in the libraries

which are not only the properties of the people of Iraq but of mankind. This betrays the cultural poverty of a puffed-up new nation without any background like Iraq's and utter contempt for original culture and civilisation.

Who will try George W. Bush, Tony Blair and their accomplices for the war crimes committed against Iraq for oil and the establishment of Israel on a firmer footing as the regional super-power?

The dangerous "Doctrine of Pre-emptive Strike" may now be used by any stronger power to undertake strikes against a weak neighbour on any excuse. Humanity is at stake now!

But weapons however dreadful and destructive cannot conquer the human spirit. History has it that no power on earth could permanently hold its sway over peoples of the world at different times. Every cloud has a silver lining. The three European powers -- Russia, France and Germany -- met recently at St. Petersburg. The poverty-stricken North Korea's intransigence also is obviously with China's covert support. Obviously a rival 'pole' is building up. The Labour Party's debacle in the recent local council elections in Britain is clearly an indication of the disapproval of a large section of Britain's people for Tony Blair's blind support for Bush's war on Iraq.

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Lesson from Baghdad Pact: Elusive democracy!

Building a legitimate democracy in Iraq requires much more than regime change. It requires a reassuring civil society, strong support for the rule of law, and a political culture. These will require many years to develop... Iraq's shrinking middle class, a potential base of support for democratic rule, has been crushed by economic hardship and political repression... Enduring ethnic and religious tensions are likely to explode in political violence as repressed groups, such as the Kurds and Shiites, reassess themselves and seek vengeance against their former oppressors.

Therefore, what it seems is not a cakewalk for Bush administration. US should be cautious and take the lessons from Britain. US should remember that the British, welcomed as liberators in Baghdad in 1917 after defeating the Ottoman Empire, were the target of the "Great Iraqi Revolution" three years later. That uprising took the British soldiers more than four months to quell, at the cost of 450 British dead and 1,250 wounded, and was followed by repeated tribal and nationalist

uprisings until 1936. Britain established the trappings of democracy -- a constitution, parliament, king, and council of ministers -- but British interposing, Iraqi political corruption, and the government's incapability to meet the basic needs discredited democracy in the eyes of many Iraqis. Iraq's army eventually terminated Iraq's democratic experiment, staging 15 coups between 1936 and 1968, when Saddam Hussein's Baath party seized power. The Bush Administration though pledged to turn Iraq over to the Iraqis as soon as possible to minimise the risks of an anti-American backlash, but Iraq may not be ready for full-fledged democracy by the time US troops withdraw over the next two to five years. The Bush Administration should patiently assist the Iraqis in laying the foundations for democracy in Iraq, but it should also avoid pressing for an overly ambitious rapid democratic transformation that could bring anti-democratic forces to power and/or destabilise Iraq. US needs to avoid pitfalls on the path to democracy. Iraq, unlike Afghanistan, has considerable oil wealth, a well-educated population, a secular tradition, and a modern infrastructure. But