

Continuous quorum crisis

A mockery of our parliament

THE 'quorum crisis' is seriously affecting the functioning of the parliament. In fact, it made a regrettable record last Saturday when the session began with only around sixty MPs two hours later than the scheduled time. A similar scene took place the following day as well. It is, without any doubt, reflection of indiscipline and total lack of regard for the posts the MPs have been elected to by their voters. On most occasions, half of the seats look empty at any given time, especially on those moments when the leader of the parliament as well as the opposition are not present. Needless to say, they have made the House most ineffective with such irresponsible behaviour.

It is by now obvious that being present at the sessions on time has become less important to the policy makers than attending to other business. But what they seem to have forgotten is that by addressing those 'more important' things, the MPs are insulting their electorates, not to mention costing the exchequer millions. A survey by Transparency International shows, the quorum crisis in the fourth, fifth and sixth parliament sessions cost the country more than 20 million taka. But the politicians look undeterred by this fact. Instead they are busy accusing each other for the crisis. In our view, both the treasury and opposition bench should be blamed for this unfortunate event, but the responsibility falls largely on the treasury bench which has a vast majority of more than two hundred MPs in the House.

We find the comment by the Law Minister, Moudud Ahmed that the leader of the House was not needed to be present all the time, slightly sweeping. Of course we don't expect here to be present all the time, but she should be present most of the time. However, in reality we see her more absent than present. She must set example that the others could follow.

The sooner the policy makers realise that it is their primary responsibility to attend the parliament, the better. They are obliged to do so to their voters. We would urge the leaders of the parties and the whips to take steps to ensure the presence of MPs in the House and stop making a mockery of our political system.

RMCH strike

Patients should not be made to suffer

THE strike by interns at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) has created an unbearable situation for the patients, particularly those seeking treatment at the emergency. Some of the patients are also reported to have left the hospital.

The hospital, for obvious reasons, cannot provide the services that patients need when 200 interns are not performing their duties. The council of interns has set a six-point demand as part of their movement. The trouble started when a young doctor died at the hospital a few days ago. His colleagues believe that he died because the hospital failed to provide the necessary treatment.

That is no doubt an observation, which would give rise to a number of questions. It is not hard to imagine what kind of treatment people get in a hospital where one of its doctors had to die 'untreated.' It has further transpired that life-saving drugs were not available at the hospital and even the ECG machine was out of order. It seems many lapses and shortcomings created the situation in which the doctor had to die without the treatment that might have given him a chance of surviving.

The death of the doctor has laid bare the total mismanagement and innumerable constraints that our hospitals are saddled with. Of course, there is no way to support a strike in a hospital, which certainly means suffering to innocent patients. But we must also take note of the fact that interns are going on strike from time to time, as their demands remain unfulfilled. The health authorities have to ensure that hospitals are not paralysed by interns agitating over issues like non-payment of salaries.

The RMCH strike had its origin in a death that the interns believe was avoidable. They have experienced anguish first-hand, as one of their colleagues became the victim of the very system that they work for. However, the interns, or all doctors for that matter, should realise that they must not cause the same anguish to the patients and their near and dear ones by creating an uncertain situation in a hospital. Introduction of a better and more reliable medicare service in the hospital is perhaps the best way to remember the doctor who died under unfortunate circumstances.

The coalition in the dock!



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PUTTING the other side in the dock has always been the privilege of the winners, although both sides might have perpetrated the crimes during the war. Because it is the victors who have often been able to turn might into right ignoring their own blatant excesses and violations and immorally penalising the adversary. The cases relating to Gulf War II are not going to be any exception. Yet at Nuremberg in 1945 the western states knew that their relentless bombing of German cities could pose awkward questions during the trial and quietly dropped their charges against the Luftwaffe. The western democracies sat alongside totalitarian Soviet Union in leveling charges against the axis powers which, many people argued at that time, could itself be regarded as offence on several of the same counts for which German leaders were indicted. The present global moral standard is left with few such qualms of conscience and the highly dubious western conscience will obviously have few problems in arraigning Saddam and his henchmen to ensure that they join Milosevic at the Hague as warning to the tyrants world wide that a grim justice awaits them. Saddam and his men will, of course, be expected to pay the way Hitler and his gang were in 1945.

But this time around the situation is different. The legal position of the parties involved in Gulf War II is

Ironically, the only one instrument the Allies could find in 1945 to

anything but clearcut. A good deal of informed opinion worldwide regard the Anglo-American invasion and conquest of Iraq as an illegal act of aggression in the course of which it is the coalition forces which have perpetrated numerous war crimes while pulverising Iraqi resistance which was legally and morally put up by the Iraqis in their right of self defence. If the WMD excuse for war proves to be a hoax -- as it is already a certainty -- the Nuremberg precedent might be invoked to argue that committing crimes in order to overcome tyranny is legally permissible but there is an awkward contrast with the treatment of German war crimes in 1945: now it is the US and Britain that many believe have waged a war of aggression.

An indictment of the coalition can have three main elements of prosecution. In the first place the US and Britain have waged an illegal war without the sanction of a UN resolution although such a resolution would have given only a dubious legality when it comes to a war launched in violation of UN charter and fought on such a grand scale. Any argument that Saddam's failure to disarm fast enough justified the invasion of his state, the destruction of Iraq's major cities and the killings of thousands of Iraqis fails on the legal concept of proportionality. The suspected -- but as yet unproven -- violations of disarmament resolutions cannot justify in international law the massive destruction and dislocation of the entire state of Iraq.

The second and third elements of any prosecution derive not only from the presumption that the coalition has waged an illegal war. As at Nuremberg the subsequent killings of civilians and mistreatment of prisoners in a war of aggression also very much constitute war crimes in their own right. The American and British killings of thousands of Iraqis can be viewed in this light. The mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners are abysmal as the pictures of stripped and bound prisoners have already been released. The camps constructed early in the campaign

were closed to the Red Cross in defiance of the Geneva Convention. If prisoners are subsequently taken to the US and subjected to the same treatment as the Afghan soldiers held at Guantanamo Bay, that too would be violation of international law.

Nevertheless, the sad truth is that the prosecution has always been a function of power. No one seriously believes that despite of strong case of war crimes against them, Bush-Blair would ever be indicted. The international law works only against the weaker states. The big powers

have an unmerited but unassailable immunity. Even if any one is brave enough to try to indict the coalition leaders, the US has already refused to ratify the statute establishing the International Criminal Court which came into force in 2002. Since then, however, the courts have been set up to deal with gross violations of international law and human rights.

Technically, it can prosecute state nationals from the states that have not subscribed to the statute. But the view has been widely held that the US refused to support the statute because it wanted to dish out its own justice without subjecting its nationals to commonly agreed jurisdictions of International Court. It is also to invalidate the whole concept of such justice and confirm the fact already evident that political power, not justice will determine the future of the enterprise.

What the coalition does with impunity is hailed as a war crime when it is committed by the Iraqis. The image of crude American gun law -- evident in the effort to kill Saddam -- has ominously been justified by American international lawyers. There is no prospect at all that Bush and Blair will be sharing a cell with Saddam at the Hague. The death and destruction meted out in their name will have to be lodged instead in their conscience.

In international affairs lawless behaviour is unaccountable, which is why at Nuremberg efforts were made to find some measures by which such lawlessness could be brought to account. There is now no means by which the big power immunity is to be combated. Consequently, only three weeks of coalition violence have destroyed 60 years of patient international collaboration to build a sound framework for the conduct of the affairs between the states.

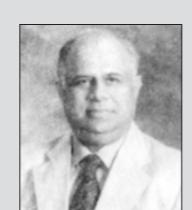
Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

PERSPECTIVES

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Geo-political fail-safe



IKRAM SEHGAL

writes from Karachi

WITH the US demanding after 9/11 that its friends stand up and be counted, Pervez Musharraf came through at risk of personal life and limb, not to speak of the credibility of Pakistan as an independent sovereign entity. The weekend at Camp David recognises the Pakistani President's pre-eminent role as a US ally at a very troubled time, it is also a brilliant US diplomatic sleight of hand meant to keep everyone happy. While bestowing a rare privilege meant for the most trusted of US friends, it avoids receiving a Head of State still in uniform with all the pomp and show associated with the White House. This mechanism assuages domestic US sensibilities about democratic mores, externally it salves India's feelings in the light of the developing US-India relationship.

Musharraf expects the US to "reward" Pakistan more for its still continuing support for the war in Afghanistan and against the cells of international terrorism imbedded in Pakistan. A generous US gesture is

expected with about \$1.8 billion debt forgiveness besides outright grant and aid, this will shore up Pakistan economically and Musharraf politically, mollifying those critics who feel Pakistan has been short-changed. Trade bargains are also in the works, these could eventually lead to a Free Trade Agreement. The icing on the cake would be two squadrons of F-16s to bring the PAF to a credible conventional air defence capability. The relatively "small" economic

coordinated by the ISI, has been nothing short of spectacular as dozens and dozens of terrorists have been rounded up. As a happy breeding ground of terrorists of all ilk Pakistan had become a haven for criminals with a booming trade in guns, drugs and money-laundering. A "rogue" State we were not but if Musharraf had not done his 180 degree turn in Pakistani policies, a few more years would have converted the present Indian canard into truth. We may have helped the

coordinated the Bush Doctrine on taking office in January 2001, he put US priority as containing future strategic rival China, India became crucial to the US. As a brief hiccup in this long-term US strategy, 9/11 converted Pakistan from a "pariah status" to a "cornerstone of US policy" in the region India sulked at being stood up once again at the tribal altar. US is now pursuing a diplomatic middle ground, one that wants India to emerge as a strategic partner in the region, "but not at the

demands that we get our convoluted policy options straightened out. One of our grave weaknesses is in international media perceptions about Pakistan, our inherent politico-ideological contradictions are mercilessly exposed by Indian propaganda, then force-multiplied by an international media that is hostile to Muslims railing against Israel and Jews, in whichever order, without due cause. For Pakistan it is now essential to mend fences with Israel, simply

"bombing" is certainly not the route. Why are we hostage to the sacrifice of our religion by our co-religionists? As a terrorist act it is against the teachings of Islam, our religion strongly rejects violent acts against non-combatant innocent old people, women and children, etc. Israel reacts and the cycle of blood and violence goes on. We are certainly aggrieved at the plight of Palestinians but their fate was complicated by Arafat's strategic mistake in not accepting the Ehud Barak offer, incidentally far better than the one now on the table. While no one can countenance Israel's violent reaction, why do we have diplomatic relations with India where anti-Muslim riots are endemic? Why, with Russia, given what they have done and are doing now in Chechnya? Why with Serbia, given their inhuman ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia?

With Palestinian PM Abu Mazan shaking hands with Sharon at Aqaba, all the Middle-eastern parties will come together in a lovefest. Pakistan will be left out in the cold as other muslim countries follow Abu Mazan's example. To contain the proliferation of adverse Indian propaganda, we have to recognise the reality of Israel, and survive in the mainstream comity of nations without being labelled as a "terrorist state" in first world perception.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

Prudence demands that we get our convoluted policy options straightened out. One of our grave weaknesses is in international media perceptions about Pakistan, our inherent politico-ideological contradictions are mercilessly exposed by Indian propaganda, then force-multiplied by an international media that is hostile to Muslims railing against Israel and Jews, in whichever order, without due cause. For Pakistan it is now essential to mend fences with Israel...if it was just a Muslim and Jew thing, then why do Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Qatar, etc. recognise Israel?

support that we did get earlier was a good enough signal for other western donor countries as well as Japan to give us succour across the board. Pakistan's economy became a net-gainer because of 9/11, a few more days and we would have been in the "default" category.

When the protest numbers in the streets the religious parties threatened did not materialise, their bluff was called. The US is still using Jacobabad as a major staging airbase for Afghanistan and the FBI support to our law enforcing agencies against the Al-Qaida terrorist network throughout Pakistan, duly

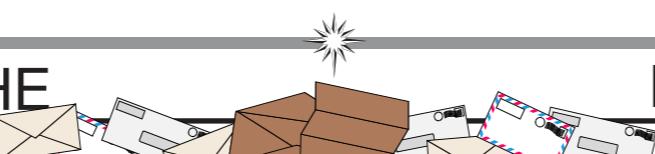
US initially by the "cleansing of terrorists", actually we have only helped ourselves. No nation can afford terrorists as acceptable part of its society, however justifiable the cause.

Notwithstanding Vajpayee talking of "peace in his time", the present belligerent "take it or leave it" India attitude towards peace is sheer arrogance born out of their belated "deep" friendship with the US, nearly three decades after Ambassador Chester Bowles May 23, 1965 Memo spelt out a pre-dominant role for India in Asia in containing China. When the US President announced

expense of Pakistan", better said than done. The US is on a perilous geo-political fail-safe line here, leaning increasingly towards India. In a recent high level seminar between Indian and Pakistani politicians, ex-bureaucrats, academics and intellectuals, etc the growing US-India friendship was flaunted before Pakistani eyes as the major reason we should resign ourselves to our "Bhutanised" fate. Musharraf has stated recently "we won't have peace imposed on us", we have heard the Indian message, and we will take our chances with it! Nevertheless prudence

because we have no reason to be enemies. If it was just a Muslim and Jew thing, then why do Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Qatar, etc. recognise Israel? The Palestinians have a problem with Israel but we don't and why should be a hostage to the Palestinian destiny? Why are we champions of Palestinian causes, when has Yasser Arafat or for that matter any Palestinian ever mentioned Kashmir as even a source of anguish for Pakistan? While one hopes and prays the Palestinians get a lasting peace with Israel for generations to come, "suicide

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

MAG - L E V

I have been following the news about MAG-LEV Trains in Bangladesh. Mr. Nazmul Huda (Communications Minister) held a news conference and told all the good things about MAG-LEV trains. Interestingly he mentioned that the fare could be as cheap as One taka (!) per km. May be the following news item will help him rethink what he said. I am positive that China's economy is much better and stronger than the economy of Bangladesh. The fare of MAG-LEV train's 19 mile journey was 6 US\$. MAG-LEV is still under research and development. How could the minister say that Bangladesh can afford to have MAG-LEV trains, let alone it can hardly maintain and remodel its 50 year old British leftover railway system!

Delwar
On e-mail

Feverishly
chemical

I wonder if the world is aware of how much a chemical threat we have become? I confess all my inside information is distressingly unsecretive-- stuff I pick up from

newspapers. But I get the feeling that just about everything that we eat nowadays have a good dose of chemicals pumped into it. Wonder if that's the reason duty on fruits have gone up this time around? Who knows! But one thing's for sure- if we're attacked we can always fill our cannons with mangoes and egg plants and confidently blitz our enemy into oblivion. If the shock of being gunned down with fruits doesn't work-- the chemicals inside them certainly will do the trick.

It's a wonder that as a race we are still able to function as ordinary humans with so much of the chemicals floating in around our veins. Fruits, vegetables, poultry, fish, beef-- none have escaped. Condensed milk was unceremoniously squashed overnight. So were the jute mills. Oh I forgot, so was ETW! So how come there's no 'drive' or 'operation clean fruits' to rid us of this menace? Surely this presents a pretty potent danger to all of us. Or maybe the new measures in the budget to make these staple products more expensive is a subtle way of making us avoid it. If this was the aim-- the budget needs to be lauded by all means. But then duty on alcohol was brought down. If taxes are ways of changing buying habits, I certainly have doubts about this

quietly! However, the peace-loving citizens of Earth are not like Bush and Blair. They are kind and reasonable people, and that is why we want to give Bush/Blair a fair trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC). We want to give them a chance to explain their behaviour to the international community.

So, considering the way Blair and Bush have treated other people, I think we are being MORE than kind to them by taking them to ICC. Wouldn't you agree?

Azad Miah

Oldham, UK

The missing point
I live in a town with more Christians than most other towns of Bangladesh. Many of them are converted, or second or third generation of the converted lot. I never find any of them confused, or victim of fundamentalists as pointed out by Mr. Shahnewaz from New York. And if any victim of fundamentalists was converted, it is the fundamentalists and their supporters are to be blamed, not the ones who gave the victim a new life. All the Christians I suggest Mr. Shahnewaz spend some time listening to the speeches of our Maulanas rather than spending time in churches. Only then he will realise why we are considered backwards and dangerous by most of the world.

Abu Hashem

Bangladesh

Dhaka

tain social relationships with neighbours, and most importantly, DO NOT spend time trying to find faults of people from other religions.

Mr. Shahnewaz writes a lot about the Churches and their propaganda. Isn't the same true for us? I could not recall any Khutba (Speech by imam after the prayer) where the Imam prays for the safety of the so-called Muslim Ummah from the "Ihdus and nassaras"! Some people pointed out the financial benefit provided by the missionaries. Yes, the Christians spend money to provide food, housing to a person when Osama Bin Laden spent millions to buy arms from America. The money spent by Laden in those training camps in Afghanistan could be used to provide food to all the Afghan children for several years.

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Dhaka

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Here the teachers can teach according to their own comfort. They can take three or four classes and finish their syllabus. Here the result gets out one year after the examination is held. Nobody is held accountable here. The Dhaka based education system of our country does not give