

Bangladesh hitting corruption abyss

TI's finding better not be trifled with anymore

WE cannot sit pretty as a topper on the global corruption dossier with all the adverse publicity it brings on our image. Infamy is unsavoury, unpalatable and thus not easy to digest. But the feeling gets even worse for the fact that we have emerged as the most corrupt country in the world for the third year running.

The Berlin-based Transparency International has put Bangladesh atop the list of corrupt countries on the basis of a 'perception' index. The ranking reflected the perception of business people, academics and risk analysts, both resident and non-resident. Impressions are not immutable; these are amenable to change depending upon how seriously a country, tainted by corruption, took its adverse for turning things around. In fact, some of the poorly performing countries in the perception index of previous years bettered their records for 2003. Bangladesh by default evidently does not belong to that category.

It is hardly a consolation that we have ranked that badly not among 190 plus countries there are on the globe but among 133 countries tested on the corruption index, leaving a large number out of the transparency evaluation exercise.

'Perception' is important, because it is a synonym for image, good or bad. To be dismissive about a negative one can only bring greater harm to national image, which in turn, needless to say, could tell upon investment prospects of the country.

The government of the day, whether this one or the previous one has been rejectionist towards Transparency International's corruption ranking of Bangladesh. In our alternating scenarios of changing of the guard between the AL and the BNP, every time the TI came out with its finding, the party in power tried to debunk it while that in the opposition invariably fell for using it as a propaganda tool against the government. In the present case, finance and planning minister M Saifur Rahman has gone a step further as a government's spokesman: he has taken upon himself the task of probing the basis of TI's ranking of Bangladesh, whatever that means! He has already questioned the validity of the corruption rating saying it was based on newspaper reports and comments. Is another conspiracy theory on the anvil to attribute the ranking to some 'dubious' sources like it was touted during the erstwhile government? We hope not.

Amidst the reaction overkill of the ruling party to the TI report and the opposition deriving ammunition from it to use against the government, the real issues of corruption are getting obscured once again. The heart of the matter is corruption has evolved to this state with contributions from both AL and BNP governments. The malaise fed on inaction proliferating across the institutions over time. If the TI's report caused 'embarrassment' to a ruling party, successive governments' failure to combat corruption has brought disrepute to the whole country.

So obsessive have we been about the ranking that the need for an all-out action programme was lost on us. There ought to have been a three-pronged strategy to contain corruption. First of all, we should have taken issue with the development partners and multilateral financing institutions to have them enforce international conventions to curb bribery by transnational companies. The TI report pertinently underlines the imperative necessity for making sure 'private businesses fulfil their obligations under the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, namely to stop bribing public officials around the world.'

Internally, we do need to simplify the procedures in government offices and public sector corporations. An overarching remedial solution would be to introduce E-governance at all levels. Technology is there to employ to seal the routes of corruption in the public service and business arenas. The government must welcome a greater civil society role in combating corruption. Last but not least, the missing institutional links have to be provided: how dare we fight corruption without strong local self-governing tiers, a truly independent anti-corruption commission and an ombudsman's office in place?

Governor Schwarzenegger

Can he terminate California's economic ills?

ZAFAR SOBHAN

IT'S official. Arnold Schwarzenegger is the 38th governor of California, the largest state in the US and the sixth largest economy in the world. In the end it wasn't even close. The incumbent governor, Gray Davis was recalled by a resounding 10 point margin and Schwarzenegger romped to victory, garnering 48 per cent of the vote to replace him, and easily outpacing his nearest rival from out of the field of 135, Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante, who finished a distant second with 32 per cent.

Confused observers around the world who best know Schwarzenegger from his role as a robot from the future come first to destroy mankind and then to save it in the Terminator trilogy can be permitted to wonder what this all means and whether his election should be taken as the latest sign of the Apocalypse.

Now, it would be understandable for one unfamiliar with Schwarzenegger beyond his roles on the silver screen to conclude that the state of California has lost its collective mind. But Schwarzenegger is more than the muscle-bound Neanderthal he appears to be on screen.

The first thing to note about Schwarzenegger is that, appearances to the contrary, he is not a complete idiot. In interviews he comes across as thoughtful, astute, and intelligent, and he is considered to be an impressive man by political commentators and pundits. He sounds a lot dumber than he really is due to his impenetrable accent, but his mangled vowels and comic-book physique mask a shrewd and calculating intellect.

Nor is Schwarzenegger a political novice. Even before his run for governor, he was well-known in Californian political circles for his

It is unclear what the governor can do about the deficit short of raising taxes or cutting services, neither of which will endear him to the electorate. Indeed, Governor Schwarzenegger is now on record as saying that he will not raise taxes, which leaves cutting services. If he takes that route, California's 38th governor could find that his popularity is short-lived.

activism, acumen, and ambition, and has for years been spoken about as a man with a bright political future. He campaigned for the first President Bush in 1988 and has been active in Republican political circles for almost two decades.

Recently Schwarzenegger spear-headed a ballot initiative to fund after-school programmes for school-children, and his leadership was widely credited with being instrumental to the initiative's success. Indeed, one can reasonably argue that Schwarzenegger's political ambition and acumen have been evident since 1981 when he married Maria Shriver, JFK's niece, and thus connected himself with the first family of US politics.

But to fully understand Schwarzenegger's election as governor, it is important to appreciate the different factors that converged to bring it about.

The first factor was the massive unpopularity of the sitting governor, who was blamed by the public for the state's economic woes and was perceived to be running a corrupt, politics-as-usual administration. When people are turned off by politics and politicians in general, the field is left wide open to someone outside of the political mainstream to come in and set things right.

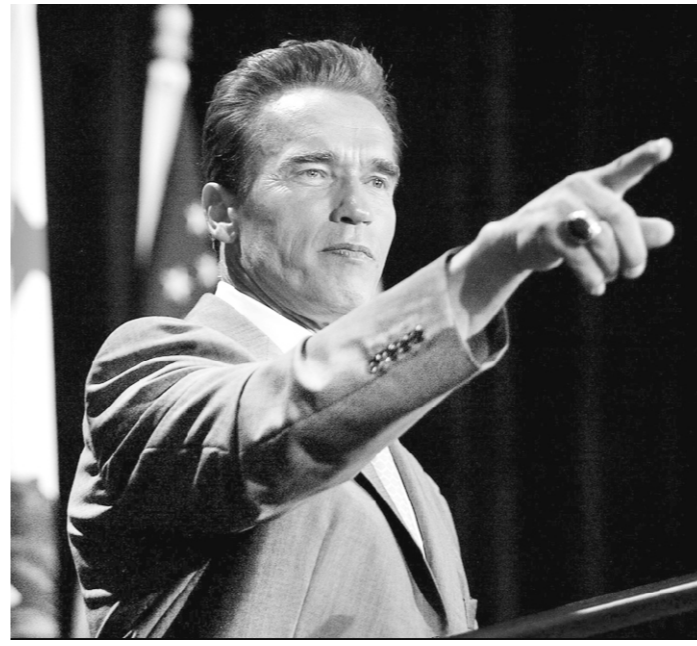
The second factor was the circus-like atmosphere which surrounded the recall election. The state constitution permitted anyone who garnered 80 signatures and put

in \$3000 to run, resulting in a field of 135 candidates who included diminutive former child-star Gary Coleman (of Different Strokes fame) and editor of Hustler magazine Larry Flynt. In addition, due to the vagaries of the laws governing the recall, the campaign ran a mere 77 days from start to finish. Such a situation was always going to favour a celebrity with star power and high name-recognition. The choice for voters was essentially

Schwarzenegger, Lt. Governor Bustamante, conservative Republican Tom McClintock, and a freak show of 132 odd-balls. Astonishing though this might sound, Schwarzenegger was the only legitimate non-politician in the field, which meant that if you were sick of politics-as-usual and wanted to send a message to the lawmakers in Sacramento (the state capital), he was the only game in town.

But the most important factor behind Schwarzenegger's election was the fact that he is a Republican. The recall election can best be understood as a coup engineered by the Republican party to oust the Democratic governor and replace him with a Republican. Gray Davis limped to victory over the relatively unknown Republican nominee, Bill Simon, by 47 per cent 42 per cent. Soon after the election, as the enormity of the state's economic distress began to finally filter through to the electorate, Davis's popularity plummeted and the Republicans saw their opening. Electable Republicans are in short supply in California and the Republican party was looking for someone with the star power to ensure that David would be recalled and to defeat Bustamante in the election to replace him. Schwarzenegger fit that criteria to a T -- and this more than any other reason is why he is sitting in the governor's mansion in Sacramento.

The question now is what kind of a governor he will make. The last days of the campaign were dominated by revelations of Schwarzenegger's misogynistic behaviour towards women and rumours of his admiration for Hitler. Schwarzenegger and his supporters have tried to brush off these accounts of him groping and pawing his way through Hollywood over the past three decades by suggesting that they amount to nothing more than bad behaviour and that he is



Arnold Schwarzenegger: From silver screen to ground reality.

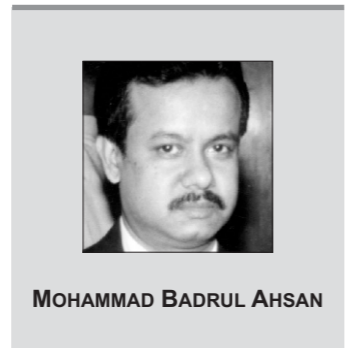
duly repentant. The allegations of misbehaviour which for the most part have not been denied by Schwarzenegger, however, are troubling in the extreme as they paint a picture of a man with a cruel and sadistic streak who enjoys using his power and authority to demean and humiliate others, especially women. The quote attributed to Schwarzenegger about Hitler reveals not so much admiration of Hitler *per se* as admiration of the power he wielded, but to my mind the megalomania hinted at is almost as disturbing as if Schwarzenegger did have Nazi sympathies.

So while Schwarzenegger's intellect and political acumen are not bars in my mind to his suitability for elective office, I remain deeply concerned by his apparent misogyny and megalomania. Nor do I have much faith that he will be able to cure California's economic ills. The state is running a deficit of \$38 billion due to a revenue shortfall caused by the poor economy and the after-effects of an energy crisis during which electric companies such as Enron bilked the state for \$9 billion through illicit market manipulation.

It is unclear what the governor can do about the deficit short of raising taxes or cutting services, neither of which will endear him to the electorate. Indeed, Governor Schwarzenegger is now on record as saying that he will not raise taxes, which leaves cutting services. If he takes that route, California's 38th governor could find that his popularity is short-lived.

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Bush is beating around the bush



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

TIME to write about Iraq again, because George W. Bush has been beating around the bush. The US President was coxswain in the State of the Union Address on 28 January 2003. He said, "Our intelligence officials estimate that Saddam Hussein had the materials to produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agent." In May 2003, a caving Bush told reporters "I'm not surprised if we begin to uncover the weapons programme of Saddam Hussein -- because he had a weapons programme." Now six months into the invasion of Iraq, he wants to mount a weapons hunt, which has cost \$300 million already, and needs \$600 million more.

So, what can you say? This is perhaps how George Bush likes to run his business. He burns down the house before he finds the rodents. But then we all know that there is another practice in the police force. If they kill the wrong person in an encounter, they fire from a backup gun and then throw down the weapon next to the victim. It is to claim that he was killed when the police had returned his fire.

George Bush has been using the same pretext these days. He has recently claimed that it was right to remove Saddam from power, because he was a threat to the United States. What else could he do? His popularity is shrinking, the condemnation of his invasion of Iraq is growing, and he is now eager to engage the same United Nations, which he once spurned, in the mad rush to conquer an oil-rich nation.

What else could he do, really? He tried other means to prove that the

"It does not mean that we've concluded there are no actual weapons. It means at this point in time -- and it's a huge country with a lot to do -- that we have not yet found weapons." It's hard to believe that Saddam Hussain, who couldn't hide his sons and colleagues from the US search, has been able to stash away his large depots of WMDs so that nobody could find.

Kay must have taken his cue from what happened to an earlier dissembler named Joseph C Wilson IV.

time staying focused on the truth that he has used a false pretense to justify his war on Iraq. Perhaps it's his conscience that keeps him astir, shifting his mind from reflex to reflex as he tries to escape from reality and take refuge in the chimera. But someone needs to tell him that he has become a big drink of water with all his cock and bull stories about WMD in Iraq. And even if he claims to have found any proof of WMD after all these months, you can bet him dollars to doughnuts that people

telling from one thing to another, waffling around excuses while changing his tone. So, what if Saddam was a threat to the USA? Once the USSR was a threat to the USA, but did the USA ever dare to invade the USSR? Instead it had engaged in the cold war with a formidable foe, which couldn't be bullied. The whole encounter was to contain the conflict, not to seek a final solution.

George Bush invaded Iraq because he knew that the country's

CROSS TALK

Osama bin Laden is a fervent terrorist and Saddam Hussain is a former autocrat. One used fear because he wanted to change things around him, while the other used fear to maintain the status quo. George Bush has used fear to overcome fear and then turned it into an opportunity. But then fear is opportunity so long as it is a state of mind. George Bush is beating around the bush, so that the truth never comes out. He is more scared than his enemies are. Because he knows that if the truth is known, he has nowhere to hide.

WMDs were in Iraq. Last month, David Kay, a former UN weapons inspector, who now reports to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), submitted his progress reports to two Congressional Committees. So far, he concluded, that no nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons have been found in Iraq. Skeptics believe that Kay, who leads the Iraq Survey Group, a team of 1200 multinational inspectors looking for WMD, is George Bush's anchorman in his desperate bid to legitimise the invasion.

But Kay has been cautious in his conclusion. "We have not found at this point actual weapons," he said.

Wilson, a veteran diplomat, had been dispatched by the CIA to check whether Iraq had been trying to buy "yellowcake" uranium from Niger.

The White House brushed aside his report when he concluded that there was no evidence of any such effort. When Walter Pincus of *The Washington Post* reported on Wilson's trip, Wilson himself went public in a *New York Times* op-ed essay on 6 July 2003. Seven days later on 14 July, Robert Novak, a Republican stalwart, retaliated with a story that Wilson's wife, who was a CIA operative, had been instrumental in sending Wilson to Africa.

In fact, George Bush has had

are going to find it difficult to be convinced by his monkeyshines.

Sorry, if I sound indiscrete in my criticism of the leader of the free world. If you carefully consider, George W. Bush has razed to the ground many twin towers of this civilization. He has destroyed decency first of all, and then humanity, freedom, democracy, honesty and truth afterwards. One of the guiding principles of justice is that nobody is guilty until proven. Yet Bush has violated the sovereignty of a country and is now trying to prove why he has done it.

Therefore, he has been beating around the bush. He has been

military strength was no match for his might. He knew Iraq could be easily taken, and that is one reason why Donald Rumsfeld sent fewer troops than wanted by his military commander. That is why, he didn't wait for a UN resolution or the support from other nations. He knew that the UN inspectors had already inventoried Iraq's arsenal, and there was no weapon deadlier than Saddam's big mouth.

In February 2003, George Bush carped in a radio address, "We have sources that tell us that Saddam Hussein recently authorised Iraqi field commanders to use chemical

weapons-- the very weapons the dictator tells us he does not have." The whole world knows for record and there were many embedded reporters, who did live telecast of the Iraq invasion, that not a single chemical weapon was used on the American soldiers. Even till today, after the US soldiers killed his sons, Saddam hasn't ordered use of chemical weapons on them.

For a long time to come, why George Bush went to Iraq will remain a mystery. It could be because he wanted Iraqi oil. It could be to give Saddam his comeuppance. One could argue that Bush went to Iraq to eliminate the only threat not to USA but to Israel. Perhaps Bush will say many more things to justify one of the most nefarious invasions of a free nation. But one thing will stick out in the face of all odds that he terrorised Iraq to get rid of its dictator. That he accomplished one of the most ludicrous contradictions in the annals of military conquest.

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Solidarity among Muslim states key to peace

ABMS ZAHUR

THE Muslims in general and the Arab Muslims in particular have been placed in a peculiar position after the 9/11 incident. Due to inept handling of such a sensitive issue Bush Administration has failed to contain "international terrorism." It wrongly calculated that killing or capturing of Osama bin Laden or his group (Al Qaeda) will destroy or retard international terrorism. In its zeal to destroy Laden supporters it destroyed the weak and emaciated Afghanistan. Its puppet Afghan Government has neither the ability nor the will to control the Taliban activities or to undertake any proper programme for reconstruction or rehabilitation. On the other hand the Taliban supporters are gaining ground. With Laden believably alive the Al Qaeda group is operating successfully from inside Pakistan. It is extremely doubtful that even NATO's involvement will make much of a difference. The relentless bombing by the alliance forces destroyed houses, shops or business establishments or crippled large number of Afghans but it could not destroy the will of the Afghans to face foreign invaders.

The open support of Bush administration to the Jews against the Arabs has already made the Arabs

anti-American. The total failure of the Americans to handle the post-war situation in Iraq has made even the elements friendly to them (Shia and Kurds) anti-American. At present all Iraqis want that American soldiers must leave Iraq as quickly as possible. Though they do not desire return of Saddam they want to set up a government by themselves which will respect their culture and tradition. Certainly the Iraqis in general do not have any attraction for the western culture though the majority may have interest in attaining democratic order.

Slowly and gradually it has become abundantly clear to the Arabs in general that Americans are basically interested in two things -- control of oil in the Middle East and safeguard of Israeli interest. Thus it may no longer be possible for USA to divide the Arabs. Though late the Muslims of the world are gradually realising that strengthening of the Muslim world can only be done through the united effort of the Muslim community (Arabs and non-Arab) as a whole. It is time that they stop fighting among themselves. They should also start thinking that followers of other religions have equal rights to preach or practice their religions also deserve respect from them Muslims. The leaders in OIC should make solemn effort to find some ways to live in

peace with the Jews. Of course Jewish reciprocation is equally important here.

Some of the recent events after the Iraq invasion cast doubt about the real intention of USA. Is Bush administration really serious about implementation of the Middle East peace plan? It is abundantly clear that no effective peace negotiation can be held without Yasser Arafat, the most

popular leader of the Palestinians. To exclude Arafat Israelis even hinted at killing him. However, Israel and USA have failed to obtain UN resolution for ousting Arafat from Palestine. It would be interesting to see as to how any negotiation between Israel and Palestine can be effective if not endorsed by Arafat and rejected by majority of Palestinians.

President Bush is losing his popularity in US. More and more ordinary US citizens have started believing that US invasion of Iraq was not based on solid facts because president Bush has neither been able

to prove that Saddam acquired weapons of mass destruction (WMD) nor his suspicion about Saddam-Al-Qaeda connection. British intelligence report about purchase of uranium by Iraq from Nigeria appeared to be fictitious.

In fact President Bush is desperate to get some sort of support from the countries opposed to his unethical and unlawful invasion of Iraq. Due

to strong stand taken by France particularly his attempt fails. Even Tony Blair's vigorous persuasion of France and Germany proves abortive. No major power is interested in placing its forces under US supervision. They are determined to accept leadership of UN only.

It appears that the Muslim countries, particularly some Arab states, may face worse days in future. Under the influence of US Indian government is coming closer to Israel. This means that we may see Indian cooperation in so-called anti-terrorism drive and Israel's active

support to India. In the name of "terrorism", such a situation emboldens Israel to attack Syria and even Iran.

Despite pressure from some major powers for quick withdrawal of US forces from Iraq and transfer of sovereign power to the Iraqis US is adamant to stay in Iraq at least up to December 2004. On the other hand instead of trying to restore law and

order in Iraq Bush administration is threatening with destruction of Iran's programme for nuclear energy development. If Israel is under the impression that with moral and material support from the USA she may hit Iran it would be a great blunder. This will not only anger the Muslims throughout the world, the Shia population of Iraq will be much more hostile toward Israel. The dream of the Israeli traders to start lucrative business with Iraq will be destroyed for ever. This will also seriously disturb Pakistan because of Iran's proximity to Pakistan, a country

almost friendly to USA.

Israel has limited capacity to expand its aggressive design because of lack of manpower. Indiscriminate killing of Hamas as retaliatory measure will seriously damage her peace effort, if she is at all interested in it. It should not be difficult for Israel to understand that only political discussion with soft and friendly approach can bring peace in the region. The Palestin-

ians must have a separate and independent state. It may be relevant to point out in this regard that Russia is trying to become the biggest supplier of oil to USA. Because of unstable situation in the Middle East Bush Administration is also seriously considering reduction of its dependence on Middle East oil supply. This may lessen their attention on Israel's security.

There is some thinking among the Islamic states about forming an independent Islamic bloc capable of facing challenge from anti-Islamic blocs through rapid development of technology, because it may not be possible for

the Islamic states to depend heavily on the Western technology as there has been some appreciable change in western attitude after 9/11. However, some of the major Western powers are not as suspicious and hostile as USA toward Islamic states. They have not accepted the US definition of "international terrorism." They have still some respect for the role of UN.

Bush administration is gradually toughening up the regulations for entry of Muslims into USA. This will result in closer relation of Arab states with some more friendly western states and loosening of US control on Middle East oil. Wanton Iraq invasion, unethical support to Israel and trifling with UN resolutions by the US have already put the world in a chaotic situation. Delay in handing over power to the Iraqis and withdrawal of occupation forces from Iraq will aggravate the situation further. The world is eagerly waiting for prevailing of good sense over Bush administration. Though USA is now the only superpower in the world she has not been empowered to trifle with the United Nation.

To-day no nation is self-sufficient. All are more or less interdependent. If the Muslim countries of the world have to emerge as a powerful bloc of independent and dignified nations they must increase among themselves mutual trust and confidence. They must strive for closer cooperation in

various fields such as economic, social, political and technological. There should be no more Shia-Sunni conflict, no semetic-nonsemetic issues. However they must be careful about irrational fundamentalism. They must also try to gain confidence and trust of the Jews. After all what real benefit can be obtained by terrorist groups like al-Qaeda? Sporadic destructive activities mainly bring suffering for the Muslims. On the other hand, the Jews must realise that their continuous repressive measures against the Palestinian rebels will not help them ultimately to establish peace in the Middle East. Only good relationship with the Arabs can ensure their peaceful existence.

At this critical juncture it appears that only option left open for the Muslims is to bring solidarity among themselves. This is, however, not a simple task. The fundamentalists must be kept under control. The Muslims must be guided more by reason and less by elemental passion. In achieving such an objective there is good reasons to believe that only the moderate democratic Islamic states should be allowed to take the lead. Leadership from such states may bring peace and equilibrium in the world.

ABMS Zahur is a former Joint Secretary.