

## Defending democracy

We are one with PM's objective but not with her method

We express our full support for the Prime Minister's determination to defend democracy. We have had more than our share of experience with military dictatorships and autocratic rule and we never want any repetition of that. We also agree that no elected government can and should be changed in any undemocratic manner. Public demonstration and street agitation are all a part of the democratic norm. However threat to topple a government is not, and here we draw the line. We accept and support the opposition's right to criticise, demonstrate against and even demand early election. But not to topple -- the very word smacks of force and imposition and as such undemocratic.

But regrettably the story is not a simple one. The repressive actions of the government against its opponents force us to express our deep concern about government's own adherence to democratic norms. We strongly object to the method Khaleda Zia's government is using against those who are challenging her stay in power. Within the last few weeks, government and the ruling party activists have done more damage to the democratic image of the country and the party to which they belong, not to mention the PM's own reputation.

While we reiterate our firm commitment to democracy, representative government and elections as the only legitimate and acceptable means of choosing such a government, we feel compelled to point out that governments so elected must adhere to democratic norms. Winning elections cannot be taken as a licence to do whatever the winning party pleases. Prime Minister will be well advised to rethink her method of running the government, evaluate the performances of her cabinet and investigate the widespread public impression of high level corruption within her party and government.

The Prime Minister's claim that Awami League is conspiring to remove her government through extra-constitutional means -- and her reference to Sheikh Hasina's comment of 1982 leaves no doubt in anybody's mind as to what she is hinting at -- puts the burden of proof squarely on her shoulder. Khaleda Zia now must provide proof of what she has claimed. She owes to the nation and to herself. In the meantime we urge the AL and some others not to talk about 'toppling' the government and concentrate their energy on more democratic method of opposition politics.

## Mosquitoes droning as usual

Surveillance failure behind infestation

MOSQUITOES are back and in full force. City dwellers were probably hoping for some respite from the menace this year. The concerned authorities had spoken about taking, in their words, 'necessary and timely actions' to save citizens from the painful bites of these notorious insects. But it was all in vain. Mosquitoes are making our lives unbearable and there are no signs of any concrete steps by the authorities to minimise the pain.

Officials at Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) are saying that work is going on in full swing -- larvicide is being sprayed in the morning and adulticide is being used with fogger machine in the evening. But many areas of the capital are yet to witness any such activities. On top of that, as always, there are not enough pesticides to kill off flying mosquitoes. And the state of the machines is not also very encouraging -- either they are out of order or not repairable or simply not adequate.

What's frustrating is the lack of urgency on the part of DCC to combat the infestation of mosquitoes from the beginning of the breeding season. If the surveillance was initiated and efforts made earlier in the season, the menace could have been nipped in the bud. In fact, we are shocked to learn that a year-long project by DCC called Dengue Surveillance Project that began in August 2001 was not renewed by the authorities after it ended. May be constant surveillance would have exposed the lapses by the DCC officials for timely correction. It would not be wrong to say that the Mayor of Dhaka and his team have failed to keep their promise.

Now DCC has requested for more funds from the government to carry out a round-the-year mosquito eradication drive. We are glad they have realised at last that seasonal spraying of insecticide and larvicide is not the only answer to the problem. Regular cleaning up of the hyacinths, small lagoons and other ponds where the mosquitoes breed, is as important. We hope the authorities will be extra cautious and not misuse the funds, if granted, and provide some respite to the inhabitants of the city.

## The US presidential election 2004: An outlook



M ABDUL HAFIZ

programme itself. Both were billed as the result of 'shock and awe' of preemptive war. So the moods were upbeat in Republican White House till more body bags started arriving from Iraq. Add to these an enviable campaign chest available with the party, thanks to its long standing ties to big business, specially oil and career lobbyists for Israel.

All those equations went awry once after the Super Tuesday triumph a redoubtable senator

interests and holdovers from the Reagan-Senior Bush era. As the election campaign gets into full gear the going for Bush will be tougher particularly when the war of which he is the commander-in-chief is in shambles with increasing number of casualties.

Yet Bush's approach to the use of unchallenged and unrivalled American power in pursuit of maximum national interests and even to overreach any defined objective struck a chord with

Belying those speculations senator Kerry chose to tread a different path. In a surprise address he accepted the premise that the US faces fundamental threat and accused Mr Bush of being too soft in response.

This brings both the candidates on the same wavelength on the policy of preemption and with regard to the question of war in Iraq. So, as a matter of strategy and conviction (?) John Kerry espouses policies the Bush Administration is

toll in Iraq is well past 500 mark. Many of those killed died after their President famously declared the end official hostilities. An alarming number of suicide victims is a testimony to the massive stress faced by American soldiers occupying Iraq. The election outcome will be determined much by how senator Kerry exploits this bleak situation even by being in the same side of war rationale. As a result, even if the competition will be tough the choice will become

the war all the way without the slightest compunction. Kerry's only criticism of the war is that Bush went ahead without taking the US allies along. As a matter of fact Kerry was a card carrying member of the war party. On October 11, 2002 he voted for the resolution authorising the use of force in Iraq. When war started he co-sponsored a Senate resolution stating that the invasion was 'lawful and fully authorised by the Congress' and that he 'commands and supports the efforts and leadership of the President.'

Since then John Kerry never apologised for the stand he took. The democrats are not touching the Iraq war or facing up to it. Neither is Kerry himself interested in that exercise. There seems to be a bipartisan consensus simply to skip the issue and get on with other things. Mr Richard Holbrooke, the secretary of state-in-waiting for a Kerry-led administration is even more hawkish talking passionately of extremism and ruling out any deliberations on either Palestinian issue or Iraq war.

Indeed, having wrapped up Super Tuesday Kerry's problem now is to be able to show where precisely he differs from Bush. During the courses of a marathon campaign he may be able to evolve one, but for the moment there is little to choose between him and Bush.

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

## PERSPECTIVES

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John Kerry hit the campaign trail as a serious challenger to the war president, George Bush. "A Boston boy, the diligent student of policy and history practically from birth, the 19-year veteran of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as well as a Davos regular with his Rolodex fat with kings, prime ministers and experts of all stripes" John Kerry would deal Bush with more than just kid's gloves. If nothing, it will not be a cakewalk for the president surrounded by a cabal of neo-cons -- the ideologues, evangelists, special

American psyche and released strong emotions in the country confronting which could ultimately be self-destructive. It was only axiomatic that the Democrats could have decided to cast the party as one of peace to combat a 'war president': to question whether the US is at war, to accuse Mr Bush of inflating the danger of terrorism for political gain or to demand an early withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iraq and other overseas engagements.

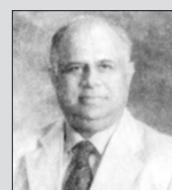
In fact some democrats succumbed to that temptation. already following as if they were his invention. It looks possible that the US' current policies vis-a-vis the rest of the world will remain unaltered even if senator Kerry enters the oval office with the exception that they will henceforth be labelled Kerry doctrine.

The forthcoming race for the White House between the two contestants -- one, a war president and another a decorated veteran of Vietnam war will have its own dynamics with each trying to hit

other below his belt. The US death

narrower. A large number of questioning Americans already disenchanted with the controversial war as well as the millions across the world left in no doubt about the Bush's skullduggery in launching unjust wars will be disappointed that there is hardly anything to choose in the Presidential Election 2004 -- at least on Iraq War. An uncomfortable truth is becoming clear that on Iraq and allied issues there is really nothing different between Bush and Kerry. The senator supported

## The plastic, boom or bust?

IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

ONE of the lessons learnt rather late in our economic life was that the Harvard model for developing countries was flawed, economic emancipation does not come about by 'exports' alone, it is necessary to invigorate the domestic economic sectors and invest in the infrastructure to fuel growth. Financial modus operandi has two modes, "how to do it" and "how not to do it". Regrettably in Pakistan we usually go the "how not to do it" route, with disastrous results.

Concentrating on credit as fueling the domestic economy the target sectors are (1) electronic consumer market, (2) automobile and (3) housing. Commercial and personal loans play a major part in economic resurgence of any country. Because of competition financial institutions adopt innovative ways of packaging loans and selling it to the right clientele. Selecting the right client should have become an art form by now, this includes verifying his/her antecedents, this is followed by disbursement. However, problems usually occur because of circumventing of procedures and lax controls, the actual bouquet of problems vary thereof. With private commercial banks now actively pursuing the credits for individuals, it should be expected that things will remain within control because of more stringent checks and balances as opposed to

the rather laissez faire once-upon-a-time attitude of the national commercial banks (NCBs) where influence and patronage used to dictate the disbursement of loans rather than any merit criteria.

In the 70s and 80s cooperative banks fleeced the public. Then came the bank defaults mostly due to fraud, force-multiplying in the mid-80s with the first whiff of political rule. It took the best part of the 90s to get our financial institutions onto an even keel. According to a recent NEWSWEEK report the 21st century raison

to firm up their positions. The Asian currency crisis of 1997-98 highlighted the fact that Asia's economies were too reliant on foreign borrowing and demand. The almost total reliance on "exports" had to be replaced by development of a modern domestic consumer shopping culture, possibly mainly through introducing credit cards on a mass scale. While the introduction of credit cards into consumer culture in Asian nations has been extremely successful, in South Korea this has backfired.

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## AS I SEE IT

**South Korean economy was modelled largely on Pakistan of the 60s yet it outstripped Pakistan because it did not have to go through Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's disastrous nationalisation of everything in sight... Twice within five years South Korea has got major economic problems of the nature that Pakistan could probably never sustain economically. While we must not do anything that will stunt economic growth, and there is a genuine fillip given to the economy because of credit cards, it is necessary to judiciously control the use of plastic in the economy.**

deter for loan default may be credit cards and small consumer loans. With liberal distribution of credit cards and easy consumer loans everyone wants to purchase something "today" what they had been earlier saving to purchase "day after tomorrow". Automobile loans, consumer financing and the mode of disbursement thereof could be of concern, their need can be assessed by comparing the per capita incomes in developed countries to our own. From an economy that was proud of its savings we have become a spending one, not bad in itself if it can be kept under control.

While giving out liberal consumer loans is bad enough, there is virtually no check on debts accrued because of liberal use of credit cards. The gist of the NEWSWEEK report was that small consumer loans becoming overdue spells bad news for unstable economies that are trying

to outpace even mature economies like the US and UK. With still more than one million consumers owing off credit cards debt with credit cards [known in Pakistan as famous "Balance Transfer Facility" (BTF)], the situation may get worse before it gets better. Korea's major debtors pre 1997-98 were corporations, they are now individual consumers. Both crises came to a head because the aggressive government drive to grow the economy went astray through reckless lending, badly

payments before loans were due, it put millions of families into turmoil. With 15 percent of the population technically insolvent, the number of South Koreans who are more than three months behind on payments is expected to rise from 3.7 million to 4 million by the end of 2004. Most are of the 30-40 age group, young people who used plastic to stock up on "Gucci" and "Armani" goods.

In Pakistan there are three areas of concern, viz (1) in the present climate of banks being awash with deposits without the commensurate

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IKRAM SEHGAL, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

## Eavesdroppers Inc.

Can anyone be immune from them?

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

APPARENTLY not. Not even such an august personage as the Secretary General of the United Nations, who everyone would automatically assume to be sacrosanct. But to the combined reach of the intelligence agencies of the USA and Britain no one, or nothing, seems to be sacred. The US eavesdropping organisation National Security Agency (NSA) and its British equivalent General Command Headquarters (GCHQ) together form the biggest and most sophisticated joint intelligence operation in the world and according to knowledgeable sources, their networks intercept, listen to and read millions of telephone calls, e-mails and fax messages every 60 minutes. In fact, every individual having access to any of these means of communication, ranging from high-ranking diplomats like Kofi Annan, members of various governments and international delegations of politicians to much smaller fry is probably being regularly spied on by the intelligence agencies. And the NSA and GCHQ make no distinction between enemies and allies and neutral countries -- in the run-up to the Iraq war last year, they targeted no less than six countries on the UN Security Council at the same time when, as alleged by the former British cabinet minister Claire Short, the offices of the UN Secretary General were bugged.

But this Act also allows British intelligence agents to perform such acts, including bugging, abroad as would be illegal within Britain. Both the NSA and GCHQ have

extremely powerful listening posts all over the world. A British listening post situated on a remote Mediterranean island, for example, is capable of intercepting and hearing air traffic, say, somewhere in China. However, eavesdropping of the premises of foreign powers and international bodies such as the UN is prohibited. Not only that, the 1946 Vienna Convention on the general privileges and immunities of the UN dictates that "premises of the UN shall be inviolable". Therefore, if Claire Short's allegations are even partly true, bugging of Kofi Annan's offices by either British or American agencies would amount to a serious violation of this international agreement. But, as hinted by certain specialists in intelligence operations, one of the reasons why the USA wanted the UN headquarters to be located on its soil in the first place was that the eavesdroppers of the NSA could be accommodated. In British national law, GCHQ and MI6 -- the latter being the British counterpart of America's CIA -- both fall under the jurisdiction of the Intelligence Services Act 1994 which rules that these two bodies can act only "in the interests of national security, with particular reference to the defence and foreign policies of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom."

But this Act also allows British

intelligence agents to bug premises of the UN. As far as Kofi Annan's offices are concerned, the UN has a right to insist that they are not bugged. But the UN has no right to insist that the premises of the UN are not bugged. So, what makes the situation arising out of Claire Short's allegations more bizarre is the British Prime Minister Tony Blair's reaction to his erstwhile cabinet colleague's claims. Allow me to quote a short extract from the

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