

## Sweeping arrests and convictions

*A serious public interest concern*

INDISCRIMINATE arrest and detention of youngsters by the police centring around Wednesday's Hawa Bhaban siege programme of the opposition have been an extremely disquieting development. It has left the citizens shell-shocked, aggrieved and outraged. They were picked up at railway stations, launch ghats and bus terminals -- in short, at the entry points to the city and traffic junctions. A countless number of adolescents willy-nilly got caught in the dragnet cast far and wide. They were hauled up on to the police vans, huddled into limited police station spaces and were subjected to excruciating hardship.

In law, even an accused has to be treated as innocent unless proven guilty. But in this case, they were picked up and detained purely on suspicion; and as far as one knows, most of them were not also caught with arms, staves or machettes on their person. In some cases, the parents might have been lucky to track down their ill-fated children before they were being *challaned* to the court.

When indiscriminate arrests are made, no matter what the ostensible purpose is, questions of law, civil liberty and right to free movement are bound to arise. If the law enforcers detain people to prevent an anticipated public disorder purely on suspicion rather than on any material evidence, the onus doubly lies on the former to prove that the arrestee did actually pose a threat to public order. That is how the police will speak in the language of law, and as an instrument of the government, rather than that of the ruling party.

In fact, in a worse case scenario, a magistrate has so much as sentenced 62 women who were arrested in connection with the Hawa Bhaban siege programme to a three-day prison term along with a fine of Tk 50 each. This, he has done, before the women were produced before the court by the police to have their say as to whether they were guilty or not. Such a summary handing out of conviction virtually based on a list of names furnished by the police -- since they were not physically produced before the magistrate -- is a clear instance of miscarriage of justice. The relevant Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) ordinance itself required that the accused be physically presented before the court. Why was this not done? If it is true that the magistrate had acted under the instructions received from 'higher authorities', as he has reportedly admitted to, then where does the lower judiciary stand?

## Bush and Blair turn to UN

*Bail out time*

AT last Blair and Bush have realised it is only the UN that can bail them out of the Iraqi imbroglio that basically is of their own making. It has been our position that the world body should have been taken into confidence in the 'coalition venture' in Iraq in the first place. The UN now finds itself in the most unenviable position of having to sort the mess out, having been once dumped by the world's greatest power. According to a high UN official, the call for a new UN role in Iraq by the British and the Americans, is a 'vindication as well as a cause for apprehension'.

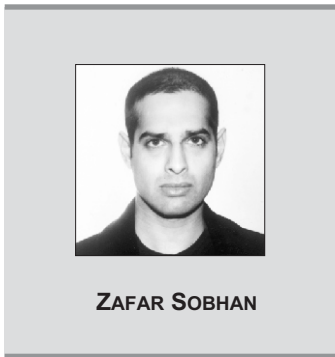
A vindication, one presumes, of the UN position that it is the world body that is the best arbiter of conflictive issues between states, and war must always be the last expedient, to be resorted to, only after all other recourses to a solution have failed. We are not convinced that in the case of Iraq all available options were weighed.

The call for a new UN role through a new UN resolution causes some concern for the world body, which had displayed a degree of impotency in curbing US-British aspirations in Iraq to begin with. The UN was made a target of the Iraqi insurgents and it had to withdraw from Iraq after suffering severe losses in life, including that of its head of mission in Baghdad, de Mello. Unless the UN can determine its exact role as well as the scope of its future involvement in Iraq, any nebulous involvement would appear to legitimise the US-UK intervention in Iraq, an intervention that was opposed by the great majority of the nations of the world.

UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Iraq, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi has come out with certain proposals regarding the political denouement in Iraq, post 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004. He has proposed, among other things, a caretaker government after 30<sup>th</sup> June, which would be responsible for selecting an interim administration till such time proper elections are held. Although this plan has its detractors, not least of all the members of the Interim Governing Council, since the dissolution of the Council is one of the Brahimi proposals, it is as close as the ideal solution to the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty.

Although we believe that the UN should proceed with caution, we do not expect it to abdicate its responsibility this time.

# Who's going to win the Democratic veepstakes?



ZAFAR SOBHAN

WITH the Democratic nomination for the US presidency sewn up, the focus has shifted to speculation as to who nominee John Kerry will pick as his running mate in November. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Ca) has suggested that he make his decision by the end of May and there are a number of compelling reasons for Kerry to do so.

The first and most persuasive reason is that it will help Kerry to define himself. The decision of who to pick for vice-president is the first important decision that a prospective president can make and generally goes a long way to helping create an impression of him in the minds of the voting public.

With the Republicans running ads on a daily basis in the battleground states portraying Kerry as soft on terror and national security, the sooner Kerry is able to define himself the better. If he leaves it too late, he will have an uphill battle to change the minds of swing voters whose opinions will already have been formed by the barrage of negative ads run by the Bush campaign.

A second reason to pick a veep early is that it adds a new face to the campaign to take some of the weight off Kerry. In addition, a vice-presidential nominee can always be a little bit tougher and meaner than the nominee for president who

will not want to appear too negative or too shrill. With the campaign heating up, Kerry could use an attack dog running-mate to help counter the mud that is being slung his way while he attempts to stay above the fray.

The third reason is that picking a running mate keeps the heat on Bush by keeping the focus on the November elections. In fact, some influential party insiders have argued that Kerry should go ahead and name his entire prospective cabinet so that people will have a

nominee in the hopes that the pick will broaden the base of the ticket's appeal.

But increasingly, nominees are not picking their veeps according to these criteria. In fact, in recent memory, only the 1960 election works as a successful example of a vice-presidential candidate being picked to give the ticket some regional and ideological balance.

In 1960, Massachusetts Senator John Kennedy picked the Texan Lyndon Johnson to shore up his support in the South and also to

sion and by adding a steady hand to the ticket.

Al Gore's pick of Joe Lieberman was similarly successful in helping to define Gore the way in which he wished. It made Gore seem bold and decisive and not afraid to take chances. In addition, by picking for his running mate the most prominent Democratic critic of President Clinton, Gore used the pick to signal his distance from his boss. It showed that he was his own man.

Clinton's own pick of Gore as veep was itself inspired. By picking

Tom Vilsack, Missouri Rep. Dick Gephardt, or Indiana Governor Evan Bayh will be able to deliver their home states for Kerry and could help him run close in the other crucial battleground states in the contested Midwest.

Senator Bob Graham is touted as being able to swing Florida and also has impeccable foreign policy and national security credentials. Then there is North Carolina Senator John Edwards who, it is thought, might add a touch of down-home folksiness to the ticket that would

ity. Bush's ostensible leadership in the war on terror and his supposed steadfastness on matters of national security are his strongest suit.

So it is vital for Kerry to define himself as strong on national security and tough on terror. This is the image he needs to project to the voting public. Kerry's veep nominee should therefore be someone who helps project that image. In other words, the best choice would be someone with a military or national security background.

From this perspective, Four-star General Wesley Clark would be a great veep. It has been argued that the poor campaign he ran for the nomination shows that he is not ready for prime-time, but the vice-presidential slot is an easy gig. I think he could handle it.

Another possibility might be Four-star Marine General Anthony Zinni who has served as head of Central Command responsible for US forces in the Middle East and is a prominent critic of the Bush administration's handling of Iraq and the war on terror.

The dream veep would be Senator John McCain (R-Az) who is also a decorated Vietnam veteran and close personal friend of Kerry's. McCain might be keeping his powder dry for a presidential run in 2008, but if he figures that he is too moderate to ever receive the Republican nomination, then he might as well go for the veep slot this time around.

I cannot predict who Kerry will pick as his running mate. But if he is serious about winning he ought to give a considerable amount of thought to picking someone with national security credentials who will help him to project an image of strong and bold leadership in a time of war.

Zafar Sobhan is an assistant editor of The Daily Star.

## STRAIGHT TALK

**It is clear that the Bush campaign strategy is to attempt to position Kerry as soft on terror and weak on national security. Bush's ostensible leadership in the war on terror and his supposed steadfastness on matters of national security are his strongest suit. So it is vital for Kerry to define himself as strong on national security and tough on terror. This is the image he needs to project to the voting public. Kerry's veep nominee should therefore be someone who helps project that image.**

real chance to look at the two candidates and see how a Kerry presidency would differ from a Bush one.

The conventional wisdom is that a presidential candidate should pick a running mate from a different part of the country to give the ticket some kind of geographic balance. This is considered especially important for Kerry since he is from the Northeast and will want to do something to counter the image that will be painted of him as a rich, liberal, elitist, New Englander with no connection to working class and middle class white voters in the South and the Midwest.

The second expected consideration in picking a running mate is ideological balance. The idea is that the nominee picks a running mate who is either more moderate or more conservative than the

add a touch of conservatism to the ticket.

It worked. Johnson most likely carried the state of Texas for Kennedy, without which he would not have won the election.

But these days candidates no longer seem to choose veeps for ideological and geographic balance, but to make a statement. Who a candidate for president picks for his veep tells us something about the candidate and helps the candidate to define himself as he wishes to be defined.

George W. Bush picked Dick Cheney in part to create the impression that he wasn't scared to ask an experienced hand for help managing the affairs of state. It reassured those who thought that Bush was too callow and inexperienced by showing that he was capable of making a mature deci-

someone similar to himself in age, philosophy and geographical background, Clinton exploded the conventional wisdom and made himself look bold by doing something different. The pick also reinforced Clinton's message of change and dynamism.

Bold and defining picks are not always successful. Picking Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman on a national ticket, didn't do much to help Walter Mondale's chances in 1984, but let's face it, no one Mondale chose would have made much of a difference.

Bearing all this in mind, let us run the rule over the possible candidates for the vice-presidential nomination. The names mentioned most often are those that will supposedly help shore up support for Kerry in battleground states.

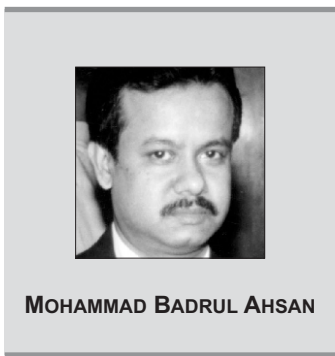
The theory is that Iowa Governor

play well in the South. Governor Bill Richardson could deliver New Mexico and has the added attraction of being Hispanic.

But, as I have suggested, picking a veep based on these kinds of geographical considerations would be a mistake. In the first place, such a pick might look too openly political, and in any event there is no guarantee that any of the above-mentioned candidates will be able to deliver. But most importantly, such a choice wouldn't help to define Kerry and that, more than anything else, is what he needs to do with his pick for veep.

How does Kerry need to define himself? The early attack ads launched by the Bush campaign are instructive. It is clear that the Bush campaign strategy is to attempt to position Kerry as soft on terror and weak on national secu-

# One circle, two centres



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

YOU must have heard of it, if not seen it, that there can be two yolks in one egg, because anything is possible in the freak of nature. There can be two heads on a single neck, more than five fingers or toes on a single hand or foot, and conjoined bodies, which hold two lives in a lockstep. But have you ever heard or seen two centres in one circle? Think hard in your mind, it's hard to fit them within one boundary.

But it is there in our politics. The true centre of power in any democracy should be the people, and the circle is supposed to be drawn around them. Instead we see two centers like two yolks of an egg, while people float around like distant boundary of a blown out circle.

All signs tell us that we live in a country where most things work like freaks of nature. Nothing works normal here, if you think about it. Your telephone, electric line, water supply, gas connection, friendship, love, social interactions, police, traffic and name all the portals of decent society. You must continuously pay up for everything, only other option being powerful connections, preferably relatives.

In the pre-historic days life was short, nasty and brutish as Thomas Hobbes described it in the *Leviathan*, because people fought continuously amongst each other and they were under attack from rival tribes. How is life different today? We are continuously under attack from many groups. The Titas Gas man pops in your house in the middle of the day and demands receipt of payment for past bills when you are not there to show him anything. He would bully your servants and then cut your connec-

tion who makes in a year only a tiny fraction of what a businessman earns in a month. One must pay for simple things like submission of one's tax return and then to get the tax clearance certificate. Average citizen works hard to earn his money, and he works even harder to keep it.

Now after you have gone through so much hassle, your phone, which works because you pay the line man on a periodic basis, rings one day when a husky voice with a deadly tone reminds

who have special interests are lumped together in each centre. The people are the boundary, which is farthest from these centres. It may not work in your mind, it may not make sense in geometry, but that is how it works in this country. It's a freak of nature with two centres in one circle, like a ring of crowd in the old days, which stood around a fight between two cocks, or a snake and a mongoose. Think about it, and it will come to your mind. The fighting centres rever-

greed on the hot seat, which has wrecked the car down the spirals, lowering themselves into the layers of hell where vices are stacked like goods in convenient stores. Some of them have done it directly, others indirectly but everybody either participated or condoned in the carnival of crimes, because each thought nothing was wrong so long as he was safe.

Nothing is safe for nobody today. And the twist of irony has come full circle, when it's not the common men but the privileged ones who are being oppressed. You can express it in many ways. People are having a taste of their own medicine. People are getting paid in their own coins. What goes around also comes around. People are reaping what they sowed.

But the upshot of the story doesn't change. Society is like your health, which deteriorates if neglected, starting with the organ, which is abused most. The rich and the powerful once turned to vices, and now vices have turned to them. The oppression of the oppressors by other oppressors has a ring of the dog-eat-dog world, when survival has turned into a fierce struggle.

The two centres are now threatening and abducting each other in that fierce struggle, while the circle stands still, occasionally reeling under its impact. The ordinary folks need not worry because their lives are not worth a ransom. The centres must decide between them, whether to yield place to the people or let nature take its own course. The nature often creates its freaks to prove that it can be ruthless, if need be.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

**Society is like your health, which deteriorates if neglected, starting with the organ, which is abused most. The rich and the powerful once turned to vices, and now vices have turned to them. The oppression of the oppressors by other oppressors has a ring of the dog-eat-dog world, when survival has turned into a fierce struggle, while the circle stands still, occasionally reeling under its impact.**

tion to restore it in no time on payment of *baksheesh*. Try lodging a complaint to his authority, and you would realise you are up against a tribe of hostile people.

The story is exactly the same for rest of the utility services that you would like to enjoy as member of a civilized society. Last year, to speak of the traffic, I paid fine for a violation, which was dated one year before the purchase of my car. Then comes income tax, and the harassment there is inversely proportionate to your earnings. If you are a businessman and know the ways of the world, you pay much less in taxes than a salaried

that your life is at his mercy. He demands ransom for holding you hostage in your own anxiety. You don't feel safe in your house, on the street, in your office, and then worry about your wife and children. The caller has told you that he knew all their whereabouts. You have government in this country, you have the opposition, bureaucrats, educated people, police, army and holy men, yet you would have the uncanny sense of being lost in an infested jungle.

Two centers in one circle create that disturbing feeling, because government is all about creating balance of power so that the strong

circles within circles, the centre of all circles being the people. The circle closest to the centre is the government, next to it is the opposition, and the boundaries go farther from the centre for each interest group. The government is closest to the centre, because the people have chosen it to protect their life and property.

Look at the order of circles in this country, and you basically find two centres and one circle. The circle comprises of the people and the centers are made of rival power groups, contesting each other. The businessmen, the musclemen, the politicians and the name-all people

berate through the layers of interest groups and the people get shook up for nothing.

I know a good number of people, who are getting shook up right now because they have received threats either to pay or perish. These are connected people with relatives in high places, people who can get protection from police or afford to keep bodyguards. But I can see their seething anxieties, the fears that swing their minds in the bouts of blind furies. They don't understand what they have done to deserve it.

I feel tempted to tell them what they have done. They have put

# BBC's list of Great Bangalis: Some questions

KHANDAKAR QUDRAT-I ELAHI

THE Bengali service of the BBC conducted a survey among its listeners from 11 February through 22 March 2004. The main purpose of this survey was to prepare a list of famous Bangalis, whom the BBC described as 'Greatest Bangalis' (henceforth GBs). This survey was fashioned following the BBC TV's programme 'Great Britons', hosted last year.

BBC prepared a list of 20 GBs from the survey, whose names were disclosed, beginning from the bottom, from 26 March-the day of our independence. The identity of the person, who topped the list, was revealed on the Bengali New Year's day -- 14 April. This person is none other than Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu, as the leader of our political independence, is supposed to be above all controversies. However, as ill luck would have it, he has been made a very controversial

figure in the country, purely by partisan politics. Naturally, the outcome of the BBC's survey has been taken politically. AL and its supporting cultural and political organisations, and public media have made the revelation of the survey result a matter of celebration, while BNP and its supporting taken and cultural and political organisations have made little notice of the news.

Impartial spectators, if there are something like this, are not surprised by this partisan interpretation of apparently benign survey result. However, they are indeed confused about the meaning, merit and intention of the survey.

The problem with the meaning of the term GBs emanates from the very methodology of survey. BBC asked each listener (respondent), who included Bangalis living all around the world, to nominate five famous Bangalis chronologically. The person nominated number one was assigned five points and so on. The list was prepared by adding the

scores each nominated person received in the survey.

The respondents identified 140 GBs, of which BBC published a list of top 20 score-receivers. To appreciate the nature of methodological problem, the entire list, with positions, is reproduced below:

Rabindranath Tagore (2<sup>nd</sup>), Kazi Nazrul Islam (3<sup>rd</sup>), A. K. Fazlul Haq (4<sup>th</sup>), Subash Bose (5<sup>th</sup>), Begum Rokeya (6<sup>th</sup>), Jagadish Chandra Bose (7<sup>th</sup>), Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar (8<sup>th</sup>), Maoulana Bashani (9<sup>th</sup>), Raja Ram Mohon Roy (10<sup>th</sup>), Titumear (11<sup>th</sup>), Lalon Shah (12<sup>th</sup>),

Satyajit Roy (13<sup>th</sup>), Amartya Sen (14<sup>th</sup>), Language Movement Martyrs (15<sup>th</sup>), Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah (16<sup>th</sup>), Sawami Vivekanada (17<sup>th</sup>), Atish Depankar (18<sup>th</sup>), Zaiur Rahman (19<sup>th</sup>), Suhrawardy (20<sup>th</sup>).

Given the vagueness of the question posed, the respondents were troubled by the formidable job of defining a GB. A GB is to be defined with respect to his/her achievements in personal life that have resulted in notable contribution to the Bengali community. This means that the respondents compared each individual's achieve-

ments, while revealing their preferences. Those identified in the survey have made contributions in different areas of our social life. For example, Bangabandhu had made immeasurable contribution in our political life. However, poets Tagore and Nazrul Islam had made similarly significant contributions in promoting and publicising Bengali literature. Thus, it is logically wrong to compare the contributions of these diverse personalities, particularly for the purpose of ranking them. The list cited above clearly shows the validity of this argument.

Second, the merit of this survey should also be questioned. It seems obvious that the definition or idea of a GB that the respondents have in mind is supposed to vary widely. For, the selected BBC listeners could be any person from a very ordinary individual, like a poor farmer or a rickshaw puller, to renowned academics, intellectuals, politicians and so on. Then each of these respondents' choice will vary in accordance with their understanding as well as moral and political values.

Let's consider four respondents -- a rickshaw puller, a die-hard sup-

porter of Bengali nationalism, a die-hard supporter of Bangladeshi nationalism and a highly respected intellectual. We can easily imagine that the rickshaw puller would never think of many names cited above, just because of the shallowness of knowledge. We can also imagine that Bangabandhu's name might not appear in the list of the die-hard supporter of Bangladeshi nationalism, while the same could happen about Zaiur Rahman in the list provided by die-hard supporter of Bengali nationalism. Finally, the intellectual might hesitate to submit his/her list because of the definitional ambiguity.

Thus, the merit of such survey is questionable, which the survey results clearly indicate.

Finally, the intention of this survey is not quite obvious. This is certainly not a news item. And because the issue involved is a matter of historical truth, this issue cannot, and should not, be subjected to normal

opinion poll conducted by news media.

This survey seems to have done a great disservice not only to the memory of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but also all other great men and women who have been identified by the selected BBC listeners.

In democracy, opinion polls, conducted by popular media, are very important instruments of revealing views and understandings of general public about important socio-economic and political issues. However, given the fact that the respondents of the survey are public in its true connotation, extreme cautions should be taken in selecting the issue and framing the question.

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