

Withdrawal from mass arrest

Who ordered it in the first place?

THE government has cried a halt to its mass arrest campaign. But, we believe, the damage has already been done in terms of enormity of public suffering, our democratic image, and governance credibility. Still, to the extent sanity has prevailed, there would be a sigh of relief. The immediate need, however, is to alleviate the suffering of the huge number of innocent youngsters who remain in captivity. They would have to be relieved of their trauma by a fast-track release operation.

The dramatic announcement betrays a certain lack of conviction, though. The reason why we say this is because there is still an attempt to justify the mass arrest already made. The need for continuing with the sweeping raid ended because 'a conspiracy' hatched to topple the government by April 30, has been 'foiled', thanks to the mass arrest -- that seems to be the perception in the home ministry. In other words, the winding up of the operation is hardly the product of any spontaneous self-realisation. Actually, the government had to retrace its steps in the face of relentless media exposes, raging public consternation, and under intense pressure from civil society and human rights groups. That the government at last paid heed to criticism is some consolation provided the recourse taken to mass arrest is not repeated.

Our paramount concern is now for the multitudes of young people languishing in police stations and jail houses. They are crammed in places scarcely enough to accommodate even one-sixth of the arrested victims. As a result, they are having to squat without sleep, thoroughly famished and terribly weakened; dehydrating without any water to drink and sickened from lack of minimal toilet facilities. The paperwork should be completed immediately to release them *en masse* on a timetable announced to the public at once so that their relatives are relieved of their anxieties.

Basically, somebody must be held responsible for the mass arrest that rocked the nation's sensibilities violently. Whose decision was it -- the cabinet's, the PMO's, the home ministry's, or any other adjunct to power? People would like to know where it went wrong and see some heads roll for it.

Middle East in a shambles

Implement the roadmap

WITH in a space of a month, two senior leaders of the Hamas were made the victims of targeted killing by the occupation Israeli forces. Perhaps the next on the list is Yasser Arafat. Such extra-judicial killings, carried out with impunity, are not only a grave breach of international law and subject to international criminal prosecution, it also exhibits Israel's pathological apathy towards a durable peace in the Middle East.

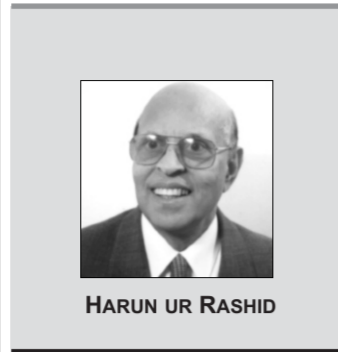
The road to peace has been made even more difficult by the latest Sharon plan, which, insofar as it relates to the Gaza, stipulates, among other things, that Israel will withdraw from the Gaza Strip, including all the existing Israeli settlements, and will re-deploy in territory outside of the strip. Insofar as it relates to the West Bank, Israel will evacuate the settlements of Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sanur, and all permanent military installations in this area.

What in effect it means that in exchange for vacating the Gaza Strip Israel will retain its occupation of the West Bank. A brief look at the map gives away the Israeli motivations. New Israeli force deployment will hem in the West Bank. It is also not clear how vacation of some of the settlements in northern West Bank will ensure 'continuous Palestinian territory in the area of the northern West Bank' as envisaged under the Sharon plan.

The illegal occupation has been sanctified by US endorsement of the Sharon proposals. US has also endorsed Israeli rejection of the right of millions of Palestinian refugees from Arab-Israeli war of 1948 and their descendants to return to their lands in what is now Israel. President Bush's statement in support of the Sharon plan absolves Israel of the responsibility of fulfilling Security Council Resolution 242 that calls for the vacation of all territories occupied by Israel during the 1967 War.

We would like to restate most strongly that, the only way to end the current cycle of violence is through implementing the roadmap outlined by the diplomatic Quartet of the UN, European Union, Russian Federation and United States. An Israeli withdrawal from Gaza must be part of the peace plan and not an alternative to it.

A damning portrait of President Bush



HARUN UR RASHID

With wit and style, the author explains how the President has managed to get away with it until now.

The second book, *Lies And the Lying Liars Who Tell Them* is a provocative and funny book. The author in the introduction of the book claims that "God chose him to write this book" satirising President Bush's entry in the White House that the President described "for a reason" to do God's will.

The book attacks the Bush administration as the most right wing one in memory and also exposes the right-wing news media for its hypocrisy. He argues that President Bush told lies about weapons of mass destruction and tax cuts. On weapons of mass

President was so opaque on some important issues that top cabinet officials were left guessing his mind even after face-to-face meetings. O'Neill's impression of the President sitting in White House meetings is like "a blind man in a room full of deaf people" (later he wanted to retract the statement because it became a controversial centrepiece that distracted from the centre of focus of the book).

The fourth book, *Against All Enemies* by Richard Clarke, the former chief of counter-terrorism in the White House and a veteran White House insider for ten years, appears to be a devastating attack on the President's performance on war on terrorism

ism by the Bush administration. From the documents she translated, she said that there was sufficient information in the northern spring and summer of 2001 to indicate an attack was planned. She further reportedly added that there was general information about the use of aircraft and that an attack was just months away.

The fifth book, *Bushwhacked* by Ivins and Dubose, makes it clear that the political system under President Bush did not go anywhere. Their concern about Bush is not new. In 1999 they lambasted his governorship of Texas and one of their prime themes is that the President has brought the values he practiced in that position to the White House. Having effectively

has exposed the process of decision-making of the Bush Presidency leading to war on Iraq.

He interviewed President Bush for three and half hours over two days on December 10 and 11 last year. The source of the book is 75 key people in the War Cabinet, the White House, the State and Defence Departments, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Woodward does not drive home any particular political line. He simply advances evidence and lot of it he puts in order. And then he puts it to the players. And they answer.

The bottomline of the book is that it was the politicians rushing army generals into war in Iraq, rather than the other way around. While Presi-

session to investigate whether the September 11 attacks could have been prevented and what the Clinton and Bush administrations did and did not do in respect of threats from Al-Qaeda.

The Commission is reportedly not getting cooperation from the White House and on 7 April, it reportedly identified 69 documents from the Clinton era that the White House withheld from the investigators. These included references to Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden and other issues relevant to the Commission. The Commission's chairman Tom Kean reportedly said: "I've never seen the atmosphere that exists in Washington. Right now it's the nastiest I've ever seen."

Under pressure from the Commission, the White House declassified on 10th April an intelligence briefing of 6th August, 2001 titled "Bin Laden Determined To Strike Us". It was given to the President as part of his daily intelligence briefing. Many analysts including some members of the Commission have asserted that the contents of the briefing challenged repeated assertions of the White House that it had no specific information that Al-Qaeda was planning to attack within the US. Some members of the Commission now demanded to know why the document was not seen as a warning of the September 11 attacks.

The Commission consists of 10 members, five Republican and five Democrat. The chairman is a former Republican Governor of New Jersey, Tom Kean and his deputy is a former Democratic Congressman, Lee Hamilton from Indiana. The Commission has two interrogators, one is a former Watergate prosecutor and the other is a former Deputy Attorney General under the Clinton administration.

There have been 115 public witnesses at the time of writing and many more in private. Some 800 government officials have answered questions. Thousands of documents have been handed over. Richard Clarke appeared before the Commission on 24th March and so also Dr. Rice, the National Security Adviser on 8th April after great hesitation. The Commission is expected to submit its report on July 26. The American people, in particular the families of the victims of the September 11 attacks, eagerly wait for the findings of the report.

Conclusion: All the books have illuminated a serious problem with President Bush and have explored the dangerous consequences of such misrepresentation of causes of war in Iraq in a perilous age. One wonders whether all the chaos and political instability in the world as a result of unnecessarily invading Iraq would have occurred if President Clinton was in office or the US Supreme Court decision on the Florida voting procedures during the Presidential election in 2000 had been otherwise.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, set up reluctantly by President Bush in 2002 as an independent inquiry, is at present in session to investigate whether the September 11 attacks could have been prevented and what the Clinton and Bush administrations did and did not do in respect of threats from Al-Qaeda... The Commission's chairman Tom Kean reportedly said: "I've never seen the atmosphere that exists in Washington. Right now it's the nastiest I've ever seen."

destruction in Iraq, Franken asks a number of questions: What did the President know? And if not, why didn't he know? If, as may be the case, the President did not understand his intelligence briefings, why didn't he ask to have them explained to him?

On tax cuts, the President repeatedly said during the campaign, "The vast majority of my tax cuts go to those at the bottom." Franken argues that the tax cuts help the rich and not the poor. He claims that the Bush administration squandered the surplus of the budget, ravaged the environment and has alienated the rest of the world.

The third book, *The Price of Loyalty* is the story of Paul O'Neill's tenure in the Bush administration as Secretary of Treasury, the top economic job in the government. O'Neill during his tenure took detailed notes of cabinet meetings and left with 19,000 pages of documents. The documents were made available to the writer Suskind, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, who wrote the book (authorised by O'Neill) that provides a rare insight into the decision-making processes in the Bush White House.

O'Neill had an impressive career before he joined the Bush administration. Vice-President Dick Cheney offered him the key job after President Bush won the elections. He was the Chief Executive of Aluminium Company of America (Alcoa). The President sacked O'Neill just after 23 months because he opposed tax cuts.

Suskind tells O'Neill's story like a non-fiction novel, from his first day in office to his last day. O'Neill found that it was impossible to have a rational exchange of ideas in cabinet meetings, O'Neill remembers, at a National Security Council meeting 10 days after Bush's inauguration that National Security Adviser Dr. Condoleezza Rice and CIA Director George Tenet were emphasising Iraq's importance as a destabiliser in the Middle East.

O'Neill found that the incursions before the September 11 attacks. Clark claims that (a) President Bush and his aides misread the threats facing the US. This, he states is because officials ignored what their predecessors from the Clinton administration had told them about terrorism and (b) President Bush has undermined the war on terror by unnecessarily attacking Iraq that in fact has strengthened the fundamentalist, radical Islamic militant movement worldwide.

Richard Clark reveals that he and his staff gave the National Security Adviser Dr. Condoleezza Rice (his boss) a chilling run-down of al-Qaeda's global operations including evidence that its " sleeper cells" were operating inside the US. But according to Clark, at the end of the session Rice was skeptical. To Clark, her facial expression "gave me the impression that she has never heard of the term Al-Qaeda before".

Clarke urged Rice to take his plan to fight Al-Qaeda to the top members of the Bush cabinet that January (2001). It would take several months before Clarke's plan made its way through the senior-level meetings. The January report went to the cabinet only on 4th September, only a few days before 9/11, and thus too late to avert the tragedy that happened on that day.

Clarke wrote: "My view was that this administration, while it listened to me, either didn't believe me that there was an urgent problem or was unprepared to act as though there was an urgent problem." According to Clarke, the administration was stuck in a cold-war mentality that saw long-range missiles and rogue states as the most immediate danger and because they were completely and mistakenly fixated on Iraq.

Ms. Sibel Edmonds, a former translator with the FBI, in an interview with the *Independent*, a British newspaper, corroborated what Clarke wrote about the neglect of threats to terrorism by the President for failing to report his sale of shares of Harken Energy Corporation in 1990 just before its profits dived, they are understandably skeptical of President's call for a "new ethic" for American business in 2002.

The sixth book, *Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush*, released this month (April), John Dean presents a stunning indictment of President Bush's administration. He assembles evidence of its obsessive secrecy resulting from a return to Nixonian Presidency. Worse than Watergate he claims the hidden agenda of the White House is shrouded in secrecy and the Bush Presidency remains unaccountable.

John Dean is no stranger to the White House. He knows what happens behind the closed doors at the White House. In fact he was a "whistle-blower" of the Watergate scandal. He acted as counsel to President Richard Nixon and witnessed the dangerous consequences of excessive secrecy, leading to Nixon's resignation in 1974.

The author lays out a blistering case against President Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney, revealing among others the following facts: (a) How the Bush administration has exploited the September 11 attacks, while secretly working to scuttle all efforts to discover why America was so unprepared, (b) How Bush's deeply flawed secret decision-making is costing Americans both at home and abroad, (c) How Bush's and Cheney's obfuscation and stonewalling have concealed government business and (d) How Bush and Cheney have taken a Nixonian approach to any efforts of Congress and the news media to check their uses and abuses of power.

Finally the seventh book, *Plan of Attack* released on 19 April, 2004 by Bob Woodward, Editor of The Washington Post. He is the journalist who broke the Watergate story during the Nixon Presidency in the 70s and now

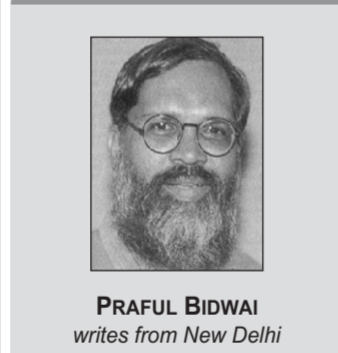
dent Bush was involved in the secret planning of war, he told reporters he was a "patient" man who would carefully weigh all options. Woodward says that President Bush left Congress largely in the dark in July 2002 when he approved US\$ 700 million to fund invasion in Iraq by diverting money intended for the fight on terrorism in Afghanistan. The author reveals that the Secretary of State Colin Powell had been hesitant about the Iraq war and Powell was informed of the decision late, even before it was revealed to the Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar Bin Sultan.

Furthermore the author writes about Powell: "At times, with his closest friends, Powell was semi-despondent. His President and his country were headed for a war that he thought might be avoided, though he himself would not walk away." According to the author, Powell saw in Cheney a "sad transformation" and had "unhealthy fixation" and Powell thought that Cheney "took intelligence and converted uncertainty and ambiguity into fact". The book describes that Vice-President Dick Cheney and Powell were not in speaking terms and Powell referred to Pentagon officials loyal to Cheney as the "Gestapo Office".

The book has put the Bush administration on the defensive. Although Colin Powell disputed the version ascribed to him by Woodward, he admitted that he had a few telephone talks with the author. Many now believe that the war on Iraq was conceived and planned in secret and Powell was "out of the loop". This provides an insight how secretly a decision on war was taken in one of the most open democracies in the world.

Independent Commission to Inquire the September 11 attacks: The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, set up reluctantly by President Bush in 2002 as an independent inquiry, is at present in

In NDA's economic cuckooland: Chasing the growth mirage



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

Jaitley --no economist either -- has the gall to dismiss as "illiterates" those who say that the 10.4 percent figure is a statistical blip, reflecting exceptionally high agricultural growth in one quarter.

It's a safe bet that these gentlemen won't "pity" Moody's, the international credit-rating agency, which has just predicted that India's growth will slow down to 6.5 percent. Mr Singh, in the style typical of feudals, will kowtow to it. Why, Mr Jaitley might even accept a brief

Oct-Dec 2003 does not reflect real economic acceleration. During that quarter (compared to Oct-Dec 2002), services grew by 7.7 percent, as contrasted with the 9 to 10 percent growth registered earlier. Manufacturing grew by 7.4 percent, instead of 10 percent-plus during recent high-growth years.

The one-time quarterly high of 10.4 percent is mainly attributable to agriculture, which picked up by a very sharp 16.9 percent due to a good, evenly distributed monsoon.

Third, it's absurd to quibble over numbers, especially future projections, when official statistics are imperfect. Ninety percent of India's workforce is in the unorganised sector. But there's little reliable data available on this sector.

In 2002-03, the CSO altered its "quick" estimates three times. Huge gaps between the "quick" and final estimates make firm comparisons meaningless.

Fourth, as eminent statistician S.M. Vidwans -- a United Nations

To examine the official claims, contrast the NDA's six-year rule (April 1998-March 2004) with the preceding six years. In the second period, GDP growth averaged 5.32 percent -- 22 percent lower than the 6.8 percent average for the pre-NDA period.

In agriculture, growth was 1.51 percent earlier, but (-)0.94 under the NDA. The 8.58 percent uptrend in industry before 1998 almost halved to 4.47 percent under the NDA.

India's global export ranking has declined. Today, with only 0.8 percent of the global share, India is no longer amongst the world's 30 top exporters. Even in services, India's global export-share is a marginal 1.42 percent.

Economists adopt a useful macro-economic measure to evaluate prospects for sustainable growth -- (incremental) capital-output ratio, or the number of units of capital needed to produce one unit of additional output. In India, the ICOR is 4.3. For 8 percent GDP growth, an investment ratio of at least 32 percent of GDP would be needed. With a 23-25 percent investment ratio, India can at best sustain 6 percent annual growth.

The people can't eat GDP growth. Growth means little unless it raises employment and incomes and reduces disparities. But unemployment has doubled over the past four years.

Here are the home-truths. India belongs to the bottom fourth of the world's nations, ranking 127th (of 173 nations) in the UN Human Development Index. Fifty-six percent of rural Indians have no electricity. Nine out of 10 pregnant Indian women are undernourished. And half of its children grow up stunted.

It's only sick minds like Mr Jaswant Singh that see "explosive growth" in these disturbing statistics. It's they who deserve to be pitied. More important, they must be sent packing in the elections.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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from this "illiterate"! Moody's is joined by the Indian credit-rating agency, ICRA, which says the current year (2004-05) will end up with 6.4 percent growth. So will the next few years. Some other economists (e.g. CRISIL's Subir Gokarn) put the forecast lower, at only 2-3 percent.

It doesn't matter much to most Indians, whether there is 3 percent GDP growth or 8 percent -- so long as they remain excluded from its benefits. Yet, the official claim is wrong on four major counts. First, the 10.4 percent growth in

This represents recovery from a downturn/depression, no upturn.

Second, point-to-point comparisons mean little in economics. Suppose in 1998, India's foodgrains output was 200 million tonnes. It slumps to 180 mt in 1999. With a better monsoon, it recovers to 185 million tonnes and further to 190 in 2001. Now, point-to-point comparisons would show a "moderate" rise of 2.8 percent in 1999-200 and a further 2.7 percent the next year.

In reality, food production would have decreased by 10 mt between 1998 and 2001.

consultant, and former member of the Indian Statistical Commission -- argues, official estimates of India's fastest-growing sector, services, have become increasingly unreliable. Services' composition has changed. The physical size of many services is hard to measure.

For instance, for information technology, the government relies on the industry's own self-estimates, which can be wishful. You can accurately record the tonnes of steel or number of bicycle being produced. But not the village moneylender's turnover.

So the "explosive growth" era claim is hollow. As for 8 percent in a single year such solo peaks are not unique to the NDA's rule. India recorded even higher growth in 1967-68, 1975-76 and 1988-89.

Sustainable growth depends on public investment, the infrastructure, savings and investment, etc. India's public investment has been recently falling. The infrastructure remains poor. And the domestic savings rate has slumped from 26-27 percent of GDP to 22-23. Foreign investment (just about 1 percent of GDP) can't make up the slack.

Can we be optimistic?

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

THIS write up is not intended to shock any one. This is purely my personal view. Over the years I have, according to my friends, lived up to my reputation as a pessimist. I have this philosophy: it is better to be a pessimist than an optimist in this country. Just consider this: it is twice more difficult to deal with any situation which you viewed with high optimism at one stage and then plunged into a pessimistic state of the mind for some unforeseen or obvious reasons.

Some one once told me that I should teach my children the facts of life as represented in its various forms of deprivations. The argument he put forward was rather

interesting and thought provoking. The way he championed his viewpoint is that, one has to have prior "training" to deal with the various possible and real deprivations that life has to offer whereas no prior "training" is required in order to deal with the material and physical comforts as they come.

Well, enough is enough. Let us come down to earth and review a few factors or elements of life and living in this very dear homeland of ours, which have turned me into a pessimist.

The economists and the financial management wizards continue to bombard us with all kinds of charts and figures as to how our economy is progressing for better. Yet I see none of that when I see the poor continue to be poorer and the gap between the well to do and the poor

continue to get wider and wider. On the other hand I remain pessimistic about the development and/or emergence of any viable and effective middle class, an essential factor in the development of democratic traditions.

It is simply disheartening to see when both our government and the entire political hierarchy put the highest value on say, the number of bridges built and how wonderful roads have been constructed as all-important parameters of our national development. Many say that the NGOs have done a wonderful job of dealing with poverty at grassroots levels; I fail to understand how. The NGOs are engaged in merely keeping the poor someone to survive at the borderline of poverty. The NGOs are in the business of building a power base for

themselves and their management gurus. I see little possibilities for change of scenarios in years or perhaps decades.

Three decades have passed, but the two major political parties have given us nothing except lessons in vandalism, demagoguery including bashing each other's opponents. The political culture has turned into a practicing ground of all forms of militancy. I do not know, but nothing short of a "mass upsurge" (perhaps not the kind Awami League or the advocates of BNP believe in) shall change the scenario for better. Once again I am Pessimistic. The scenario may not change even then.

Everybody wants to be a city boy or a girl. So all roads lead to Dhaka, Chittagong or Khulna. Hence cities are filling in water bodies of all kinds including the riverbanks

through indiscriminate land reclamation affecting the navigability of river traffic. Will there be a reversal of the situation in the coming decade? I have my doubts.

Discipline reigns supreme everywhere. Here in the capital city you can no longer distinguish between a commercial area and a residential area. Shopping complexes have made civilized living difficult for the residents of the area. Not only that it has ushered in a kind of consumer culture, which we can ill afford. One has to take a close look at the Dhanmondi Residential Area. Does any one really believe this situation can ever be reversed for better? I am highly pessimistic.

and beautiful environment of the lake in the Dhanmondi Residential Area has now been turned into a rowdy centre of cheap entertainment disturbing the peace and sleep of its residents. Our mindset is slowly turning towards a loud and messy culture of the *busstees*.

I have a small car, that I procured for the first time after completion of 32 years of service in a number of international organisations and that too forced by a debilitating condition of arthritis. As I move about the city I am continually under threat of being bumped off the road by bigger vehicles owned by the rich and the affluent of our society. The mindset is highly disturbing. I am thus highly pessimistic about the attitude of

the rich and the well to do towards the rest of the society. Will that ever change? I doubt it.

You arrive at a vendor to buy fruits or some such consumables, the shopkeeper decides prices of his merchandise based on your looks, the way you are dressed and whether you have arrived in a rickshaw, a small, a luxury jeep or on foot. I have since as per advice of my driver kept my car parked some distance away and routinely send my driver to do the purchasing. Invariably the prices paid by him are ten percent lower than what I have paid on few other occasions. We specialise in fraudulent practices, selling or buying both goods and services.