

Jalil's 'trump card' fiasco

A heavy price exacted

IN a way, we are greatly relieved that AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil's talk of bringing down the elected government has fizzled out. It was so thoroughly out of character with our political tradition and sensibilities as an independent country. The threat, however, was predisposed to failure because of its inherent lack of tenability. Even so, it had ruffled the national psyche as never before.

Jalil has actually made a fool of himself and his party by setting the deadline for the ouster of the government in the first place. Where his foolhardiness came through as a galling thing was his harping on the same tune, despite serious doubts having been cast in the plausibility of the agenda. What is clearly disparaging is that in the process he has made the whole nation suffer. The childish game he and his party played with institutions like an elected government and the parliament has created an extremely unhealthy precedent.

The stuntmanship produced a hype as sinister rumour-mongering and speculative predilections ruled the roost to the detriment of national productivity.

The government, for its part, let loose the 'juggernaut of oppression' thereby compounding the situation. Its actions fuelled panic all around. The government put up a brave face, on the one hand, in the face of the deadline; but, on the other, it became jittery as was evident from the way it wreaked havoc on civic life through the mass arrests and sweeping detentions. It knew very well that a bluff was being pulled on it, and yet it couldn't avert a threat perception over-kill -- thanks to the work of the intelligence agencies and the overcautious interpretation of home ministry. The Dhaka streets virtually turned into 'pick-up' zones, with the innocent people bearing the brunt of it all. The indiscriminate haul-up operation that the country witnessed was out of sync with the BNP high-ups being dismissive of the opposition's deadline threat.

The opposition deadline and the government reaction to it only served to multiply the fears of instability in the country. The main opposition party should shun the undemocratic path, return to parliament and raise the issues of mass arrests and the recent arms haul in our greater collective interest. These are issues of great public concern that the elected lawmakers have to take up, instead of resorting to politics of speculations, threats and counter threats.

Blair's new predicament

A letter of collective indictment

FIFTY-ONE ex-diplomats' letter to Blair, coming in the wake of the recent Bush-Blair summit, is as blunt as it is denunciatory. These retired gentlemen belonging to the British Foreign Service were prompted by the developments in the Mideast and Iraq to wax critical of British Prime Minister's policies for the region. The attack by the 52 diplomats, including former ambassadors to Baghdad and Tel Aviv, is being seen as unprecedented in scope and scale.

Through the letter these gentlemen have expressed their indignation at Blair for following Bush 'slavishly.' They have accused both governments of "abandoning important principles of impartiality in the Holy Land, while engaging in poor planning and military overkill against Iraqi resistance forces in the Sunni Muslim areas west of Baghdad and in Shiite Muslim strongholds around Najaf." The letter asserted that the Bush-Blair Mideast policies were "doomed to failure". The fact that many of the signatories had served in the Mideast during various times and are well aware of the intricacies of the Mideast scenario, lends credence to their criticisms.

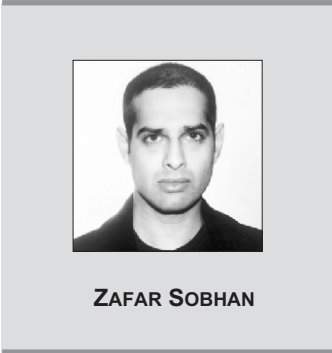
What has sensitised them to assail their prime minister, most of all, at this point in time, is Blair's unabashed endorsement of the of Sharon's new plan for Gaza and the West Bank. The deceitfulness of this plan has prompted many analysts to characterise it as a reincarnation of the Balfour Declaration.

Without going into the contents of their letter in detail it can be said that it is not only an indictment of the British policy in Iraq and the Mideast, it also calls into question the method of operation that the coalition has employed in Iraq.

If there is a weakness in the letter it is that it does not suggest any viable alternatives to the current US-UK Mideast policies. One reason why no alternatives could be offered was perhaps because these policies, formulated on poor judgment, have complicated the situation far too much for any easy bail-out.

While one cannot but appreciate the substance of the letter one wishes that this had come sooner, so that some mid-course changes could have been effected. It may be too late now for the policy to be retrieved out of the doldrums.

Deconstructing the mind of the American voter



WHY would anyone vote for George Bush in the upcoming US presidential election in November? This is the question I am asked, again and again. After all, people read the newspapers and watch CNN, and they can be forgiven for thinking that Bush's four years in office do not have much to recommend them.

But to answer the question as to why roughly fifty per cent of the US electorate is likely to vote for Bush again in November (his re-election depends on whether this number is slightly higher or lower than fifty, but, by all accounts, it is shaping up to be a tight election which neither candidate is likely to win by much), we have to understand some of the ground realities of US politics and culture.

There is a huge political disconnect between the US and the rest of the world. I remember back in the 1980s when President Reagan was considered a joke around the world. Reagan was almost universally derided as delusional or a simpleton or both. His missteps were the fodder of an army of late-night comics and comedians, and it seemed almost inconceivable that anyone could take the man seriously.

I remember how astonished I was when I landed in the US in 1988 during the last year of his presidency and found that Reagan was a much revered figure to many Americans. Indeed, to this day, many conservative Americans' reverence for Reagan comes close to idolatry. They consider him to be the finest president of the 20th century and the father of the modern conservative movement.

Reagan was not the first president whose reputation within the US diverged significantly from his

people in the world line up roughly with the Democratic party. Now, if you are conservative, then you are likely to find the Democrats a little too left-wing for your liking, and if you are liberal, then you might find them to be a little too right-wing for your liking.

But chances are that unless you are an American, you will find the Republican position on issues such as abortion, the death penalty, public health, taxes, public education, public expenditure in general, guns, nuclear weapons, the envi-

stunned that Bush is even president. They cannot understand how someone like him could ever get elected in the first place.

But when we look ahead to the upcoming election, it is not enough to look through our own eyes. If we did that, we would assume that Bush is in deep trouble and that John Kerry is heading for a landslide.

To understand the tightness of this year's US presidential race, the first thing we must do is to try to look at it through American eyes.

STRAIGHT TALK

It doesn't matter how many jobs are lost under Bush or how large the deficit grows or if he accidentally nukes Canada tomorrow. There is a bedrock of about forty five per cent of the US electorate who will never vote for a Democrat. They may be delusional or living in a parallel universe to the rest of us -- but that is the ground reality of US politics today.

reputation outside it, and Bush will not be the last.

In fact, I recall how at the height of his impeachment hearings, the reputation of President Clinton around the world was never higher, and he received a standing ovation from world leaders when he addressed them at a meeting of the UN.

But let me hasten to clarify that this disconnect between Americans and the rest of the world that I am writing of is largely confined to conservative Americans. Most Americans (including even many conservatives) thought that President Clinton's impeachment was laughable.

Having lived in the US for almost my entire adult life, I could not help noticing that on just about any issue that you care to mention, most

ronment, international relations (I could continue) etc etc utterly incomprehensible.

This is one reason why people outside of the US have a hard time understanding George Bush's popularity. There is a massive gulf between where even conservatives in other countries are politically and where conservatives are in the US.

It is as though American conservatives are this small band of dinosaurs whose political beliefs are completely out of step with the mainstream political consensus in the rest of the world (after all, where else but in the US do people question global warming and evolution and consider the UN some kind of shadowy underground organisation bent on world domination?).

Outside of the US, people are

We need to understand how and why Bush was elected in the first place and what the factors are that contribute to his continuing popularity.

Economically, it is hard to see where the Republicans get their votes. The economy boomed under President Clinton's stewardship. His economic policies wiped out the Reagan-era deficits and created a record number of jobs.

In contrast, under President Bush, the US has actually lost jobs, and the Federal budget is a sea of red ink. By any impartial measurement, the economy is in much worse shape than when Bush took it over. Simply put, people are, by and large, worse off than they were four years ago.

Republicans even concede this

point. Some might argue that the poor shape the US economy is in is not Bush's fault and that he inherited a recession from Clinton or that the recession is the fault of 9-11 or the business cycle. But most admit that if the election were to be fought on the economy then Bush would be sunk.

So, if it is not economic issues that motivate Bush voters, what is it? The answer is social issues, and it is here that it is possible to comprehend what motivates conservative voters to continue to vote

vote comes from those who oppose what they see as the secularisation and liberalisation of the American cultural landscape. To them, the Democratic party is the standard bearer for the counter-cultural values of the 1960s that they feel has precipitated America's moral decline.

To them, Democrats cater to women and minorities and the poor at the expense of everyone else. Interestingly enough, a majority of white men have not voted for a Democratic candidate for president in forty years. Not all white men feel marginalised by women's rights and civil rights and affirmative action or wish to turn the clock back to the 1950s -- but the ones who do, vote Republican.

Conservatives feel that the US has swung too far to the left and that there is nothing more important than standing in the school-house door with a shotgun to halt this slide. They see the Republican party as the party of traditional moral values and the Democratic party as the party of abortion and affirmative action and atheism.

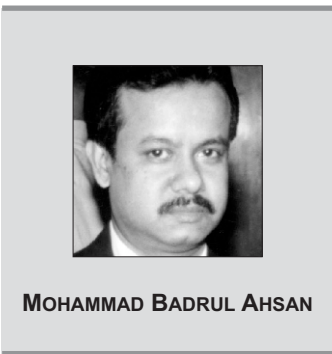
These people will never vote for a Democrat. It doesn't matter how badly the US gets bogged down in Iraq or if Bush is discovered to have been criminally negligent in not preventing 9-11 (oh wait, that happened already).

It doesn't matter how many jobs are lost under Bush or how large the deficit grows or if he accidentally nukes Canada tomorrow. There is a bedrock of about forty five per cent of the US electorate who will never vote for a Democrat.

They may be delusional or living in a parallel universe to the rest of us -- but that is the ground reality of US politics today.

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Saint George, strange Bush



GEORGE Bush strikes me as the world's dorkiest president, running one of the damn good democracies in the world. That impression was reinforced last week after I read about "Plan of Attack", the latest book by Bob Woodward, one of the two journalists from *The Washington Post*, who unravelled the Watergate Scandal. In two lengthy on-the-record interviews with Woodward, the U.S. President talked about his conviction that he was a servant of God and history, who was chosen to liberate Iraq, bring democracy to the Middle East and make sure the United States was safe from terrorism. My reaction: Come on George Bush, you haven't fully recovered from your drinking problem.

I haven't read Woodward's book, but I have read about it in essays in *The Washington Post*. The rest of the book mainly talks about how the itchy hands of George Bush planned to attack Iraq with or without Saddam's now elusive WMDs, Dick Cheney, Condi Rice and other people in his administration, being in cahoots.

But you don't need to read the whole book to know what is common knowledge. The saints get

divination, while the sick minds get delusion. I don't know which of the two George Bush has got, but his claim certainly reeked the smell of a zealot. Osama bin Laden also believes in the same thing, that he has the God's mandate to destroy the infidels.

Let us digress a bit, and talk about George Bush's primetime news conference on 13 April 2004. Bush, according to one analyst, gave the longest monologue ever given by a US president in a press conference, and he had lots of

to convince our gullible parents. We claimed that the right answer was there although the teachers never got it.

Most of us didn't get it when the US President talked about democracy, freedom, terrorism and homeland security in the press conference. Those were the right ingredients for an incumbent President to prime up his constituency for re-election. But he also came across impatient and insolent, when criticizing the Iraqi insurgents. After all, 71 per cent of the Iraqis said in a

since the occupation of Iraq. There are 130,000 U.S. troops, 77,000 Iraqi police trained by the Americans, soldiers, contractors, builders and whatnots from 22 coalition countries. The Coalition Provisional Authority headed by an American, rule Iraq, which is followed by an Iraqi Governing Council like a lapdog. The sons of Saddam Hussein are dead, most of the 55 most wanted Iraqis are either captured or killed, and Saddam Hussein himself is held in Qatar. But the cycle of violence keeps

that the spirit of freedom is the soul of democracy. Iraqis were oppressed under Saddam Hussein for more than two decades, but there was no resistance to his regime like we see against the coalition forces. Why? Because oppression is more dignified, than subjugation. That is why, more than 40 per cent of the Iraqi soldiers trained by the Americans refused to fight against their countrymen, another 10 per cent fled the scene and yet another 10 per cent actually cooperated with the insurgents.

CROSS TALK

George Bush has repeated the mistake of the past. He has usurped the freedom of another country on the pretext of being its keeper. That contradiction rang hollow in the ultimate moral analysis. Wolfowitz made it clear in his recent interview with Vanity Fair magazine that Saddam's weapon wasn't the prime reason why George Bush went to war in Iraq. The real reason, once again, was his conviction to fight against evil and seize the historic opportunity to reorganise the Middle East.

hectoring from the members of the press. One journalist asked him why he repeated the same phrases, making it hard for others to tell his one speech from another. If you ever faced distraught parents questioning your poor grades, you would know the answer. You run out of excuses and then keep repeating the same ones.

George Bush, of course, was unfazed, and he quipped that he should have learned to be a better communicator. He re-iterated that he would stay the course in Iraq and claimed that he still believed the WMDs were hidden somewhere. We pretty much used the same line

recent survey showed by CNN that they thought the United States was an occupying force, not a liberator. Then what did George Bush expect the Iraqis to do, the likes of Moqtada Sadr, and the Baath Party residuals who joined in their common cause against the United States? They also believe they are the servants of God and history, who must liberate their country from an occupying force.

George Bush doesn't seem to care for their side of the story, because he has a one-track mind. He likes to see the world through his own eyes, and he drives democracy like a dictator. It has been one year

widening from Moscow to Madrid, and Bush doesn't tell us how that happened. He occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, crushed the hornet's nests of terrorism as he would like to believe. Then who are fighting the occupation forces in both countries, specially the escalating resistance coming in the Iraqi cities of Basra, Najaf and Fallujah? Well, may be foreign militants are infiltrating Iraq to join forces with the Iraqis. To us, what does it matter? It is one coalition fighting another. The insurgents are fighting the invaders.

It's amazing how the U.S. President shows so little understanding of history, how he fails to fathom

George Bush, the servant of God and history, perhaps needs another revelation before he understands that if the Iraqis hated Saddam, they never loved Bush. Perhaps it never came to him that people couldn't be held against their will, and empires crumbled because vaunted rulers defied the simple lessons of history. The blood of a martyr is a potent potion, each drop sprouting thousand seeds of defiant voices, which multiply and create a chorus of freedom that shattered many citadels of tyranny.

The longing for freedom is death conquering, and the suicide bombers proclaimed it time and again in

their desperate ritual to liberate the soul by exploding the body. The irony of George Bush is that he never got it, instead the so-called leader of the free world conspired to undermine the freedom of another country. One columnist of *The Washington Post* recently compared Iraq to Vietnam, the difference being that one is a desert and another is a jungle.

George Bush has repeated the mistake of the past. He has usurped the freedom of another country on the pretext of being its keeper. That contradiction rang hollow in the ultimate moral analysis when Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz confirmed what Bob Woodward wrote in his book. Wolfowitz made it clear in his recent interview with *Vanity Fair* magazine that Saddam's weapon wasn't the prime reason why George Bush went to war in Iraq. The real reason, once again, was his conviction to fight against evil and seize the historic opportunity to reorganise the Middle East.

"I say freedom is not America's gift to the world," George Bush told Bob Woodward. "Freedom is God's gift to everybody in the world", he added. Saint George is right up to here, and he sounds like a visionary leader. But he turns into Strange Bush when he plays the role of God to bring that gift of freedom to the rest of the world.

Let me contest George Bush as a servant of God and history. I am writing this column to caution that Iraq will be George Bush's Vietnam or worse unless he pulled out of that country sooner than later. You could be a servant of God and history too, if you quickly believed what I said.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

Let's build a cancer hospital

KAZI RAFIQU ALAM

THERE was a time, when the synonym of cancer was inevitable death. But, with the advancement of medical science and technology, this situation has been changed and it is now well accepted that cancer like many other diseases is curable. It is now university recognized that one third of cancer diseases are completely curable, and that one third is controllable and still more -- the rest of the patients can be kept in a painless condition. If detected initially, almost all types of cancer diseases can be cured through proper treatment. With proper treatment, any cancer patient can lead a normal life.

In Bangladesh cancer has become one of the major killer diseases and at present the number of cancer patients in the country is more than 10 lac. Every year two lac or more people get affected with this fatal disease. In spite of this increasing incidence of cancer, the facilities for the treatment of this disease have remained very much limited and inadequate in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Cancer Institute established by the government in the 1980s has recently been upgraded into a full-fledged 50 bed hospital.

Facilities for treatment of cancer diseases in the existing Medical College Hospitals through out the country is very much insufficient, and in most cases, not up to the desired level of standards. Although some private nursing homes are offering care and services in this regard, they are also unable to meet needs of all the type of cancer diseases and at the same time, cost of treatment there remains very high and not within the affordable capacity of very many patients. More disappointing is the fact that all these cancer treatment establishments and facilities can offer treatment and care to hardly some fifteen thousand patients through out the year. The result being that almost all the patients coming from well to do families run for Singapore, Bangkok, Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai or Kolkata for proper treatment. And those patients who are not financially well off and live mainly in the country-side, have to embrace the icy hands of painful death remaining deprived of proper treatment. In most cases, patients from the countryside come for treatment at the end stage of their life. They receive limited, incomplete and improper treatment and leave this beautiful world with great amount of

pain and suffering.

In the backdrop of the above situation, DAM with its usual concern to mitigate human sufferings has come forward to establish a 300-bed full-fledged Cancer Hospital of international standard with the name and style of "Ahsania Mission Cancer Hospital (AMCH)" -- a gigantic task indeed. The hospital is designed to offer facilities for treatment of all types of cancer diseases and to operate on a no-profit-no loss basis with emphasis to take special care for the treatment of poor patients. Thus, when completed, the hospital will offer better treatment facilities to patients with comparatively lower costs and at the same time enable the country to save a good amount of foreign exchange now being spent on treatment in other countries.

In order to make the cancer hospital project operational at an early date, it has been decided recently to implement it in two phases. In the first phase it will have 160 beds with necessary infrastructure and facilities. This phase will entail a cost of about eighty-four crore Taka. After completion of the first phase, the implementation of the second phase will be start to raise the number of beds to 300. As

designed in the project, a number of Early Cancer Detection Centres in different strategic and important towns of the country will be established in due course with the objective to cover the entire outreach cancer patients through out the country.

For the establishment of the AMCH 3 acres of land at the bank of river Turag in Sector No. 10 of Uttara Model Town of the capital city of Dhaka has already been purchased from the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (RAJUK) or Capital Development Authority. Land development has also been completed. Design Alliance -- a specialised USA based architectural firm has completed the work of the architectural design for the construction of the hospital and necessary approval from the government for the establishment of the hospital has also been obtained.

In the meantime DAM has already established a 'Cancer Detection and Treatment Centre' in 160 beds with necessary infrastructure and facilities. This phase will entail a cost of about eighty-four crore Taka. After completion of the first phase, the implementation of the second phase will be start to raise the number of beds to 300. As

all types of tests. At present, all types of treatment facilities excluding only radiotherapy are available here and are being given to the patients. A team comprising of expert oncologists, and specialist physicians under the active guidance of Dr MA Hai, a renowned cancer specialist at home and abroad, it has ignited the light of hope for multitudes in the field of detection and treatment of cancer in the country. During the last two years of its existence 14,873 patients have received treatment and various services from this centre.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission is going to start the construction work for the establishment of the proposed Cancer Hospital at Uttara, Dhaka very soon with the target of completion of the 1st phase in the year 2007 and making the proposed AMCH fully operational in 2008.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission is a Voluntary Welfare Organisation registered with the Social Welfare Department of the Government of Bangladesh. The huge amount of funds that are required for implementation of the proposed hospital project is simply not possible for DAM to provide from its own. It has to completely rely on the generous,

benevolent and kind-hearted individuals and organisations at home and abroad for necessary fund mobilization for the project. DAM believes that these persons and organisations will definitely stretch their kind hands of generous help and with their active cooperation and guidance the proposed AMCH will see the light of the day inspiring hope and confidence in the minds of millions of cancer patients, specially the poor.

For those who would like to participate in the construction and operation of this hospital several alternative options have been kept open. Firstly, those who will donate Taka 10 lakh at a time, his name will be included in the list of founders (initiators). Secondly, by donating for bearing the cost of bed/ward/wing(s) or for purchasing specialised equipment, the donor can dedicate the same in the memory of parents, issues or other dearest one as he or she likes. The names of the concerned people if desired by the donor will be inscribed on the specific bed/ward/wing or equipment as a mark of gratitude. Finally, those who want to help for the treatment of the poor people; they can also do the same by donating in the concerned

account for this purpose. Any amount of money shall be accepted gladly with due regards and gratitude for the cause of humanitarian service.

In the perspective briefly stated above, can we not raise our hopes to receive positive response from the members of the public, specially the well-to-do section of the people of Bangladesh and elsewhere for the implementation of the project for establishing the cancer hospital which may, in due course, attain a stature to serve the suffering people not only of Bangladesh but of the neighboring countries also.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission is a voluntary social welfare organization of international repute having Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC & Operational Relations with UNESCO and it is the recipient of several prestigious national and international prizes/awards including Independence Award-2002 from Govt. of Bangladesh, UNESCO International Literacy Award-2003, UN ESCAP Human Resource Development Award-1994, Grand Prize from Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO-1996 and National Literacy Award-1998. It has established a number of very famous

institutions including Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Teachers Training College, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Ahsanullah Institute of Information and Communication Technology, Ahsania Mission College of Science & Business Studies, Vocational Training Institute for Working Children etc. In the field of Non-Formal Education, Poverty Alleviation, Woman Empowerment and Gender, Environment, Prevention of Drug Abuse and Child and Women Trafficking, Water and Sanitation etc. DAM has wide spread programmes and activities throughout in the country.

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(The Daily Star and Prothom Alo have joined hands with Ahsania Mission to assist the latter to raise funds for the above Cancer Hospital.)