can-controlled Kurdish enclave in

Northern Iraq. Allawi was also the

author of the much-maligned and

discredited fantasy that Saddam's

forces could launch weapons of

DHAKA MONDAY JULY 5, 2004

#### Open space grabbing spree Powerful inter-ministerial committee

needed to tackle the menace

AND expropriation in the metropolis has reached an appalling proportion with the wet lands at the top of the grabbers' choice-list. If our administration of khas land is flawed, our management of lakes and water bodies is atrocious. We are at a loss to understand who is in charge of the lakes, and who owns and manages them on behalf of the government!

When there are specific legislations relating to wet lands, we wonder why their conservation as an environmental asset should present any difficulty. Apparently, loopholes perceived to be rooted in the processes of land acquisition or lake delimitation are exploited and manipulated by interested parties, one suspects with full connivance of the land administrators, to the benefit of both sides, but surely at the expense of public good and the state's interest.

The essential thing to realise is that our metropolis has been subjected to unplanned urbanisation; it's an overcrowded, highly polluted, and badly administered city. The deteriorating environmental conditions are making the metropolis less livable by the day. Under such circumstances, it is imperative for the government to ensure the preservation and upkeep of all the open spaces and wet lands, so that the livability of the capital is restored and enhanced.

To this end, we would like to suggest the following for the government's urgent consideration. First, the government should put an embargo on any further changes to the topography of all wet lands and open spaces. Second, the legal complications pertaining to manipulated documentation must be untangled and the loopholes in the law eliminated, once and for all. Last but not least, the government must constitute a highpowered inter-ministerial committee and task it to look into the existing legal framework that governs management of these lands, identify its lacunae and devise ways and means to clear up the documentation mess that has piled up over the years. Fourth, the government should entrust the management of water bodies, open space and parks, preferably to one single authority.

There were directives from the Prime Minister to restore the original status of the lakes through legal means against grabbers of wet lands which have lapsed on account of non-compliance.

We implore the PM now to reactivate her directives, so that the lakes and open spaces of the metropolis are saved and the city is made livable on a sustainable basis.

#### Failing schools and madrasas

So much money misspent!

HE results of SSC examinations brought happiness to a good many deserving candidates no doubt, but the rate of failure in many schools and madrasas should not go unnoticed either. According to the Education Board Computer Centre version, as many as 510 schools and madrasas outside Dhaka drew a complete blank; not a single student passed out of them. Out of them, as Bangla daily Prothom Alo states, 442 institutions are a fresh addition. What a waste! The education minister has been quoted as saying that Tk 300-400 crore is spent for these schools and madrasas every year. One would have thought that he would be in the best position to answer why these institutions failed to produce a single student who could pass the exams?

There must be someone to clarify how such a huge amount was allocated to those institutions in the first place. Who is responsible for ensuring the standard of education in schools? Who is to be held accountable for the dismal performance of so many schools and madrasas financed by the government? It is all a tale of mismanaged schools turning out to be mere sign-boards. There is also an allegation of politically influenced registration of new educational institutions every year; and in most cases, the authorities did not even verify the credentials claimed by applicants for such schools. This practice should not be allowed to continue; a lid must be put on the wasteful expenditure.

Had the money been used by schools having an inherent potential to fare better, no question would have arisen about the misuse of funds. At the same time, had the provision for taking punitive measures against institutions which failed to live up to expectations been properly applied, then such a waste might well have been averted. In any case, the minister has promised to delve deep into the matter without so much as cancelling their registration, but we urge the government to reexamine the funding procedures more carefully and ensure that government-financed educational institutions adhere to accountability norms without fail.

# Of patriots and quislings



M ABDUL HAFIZ

VEN as umpteen patriots in Iraq have been fighting a war of resistance and will continue to refuse acceptance of the pseudo sovereignty bestowed last week on the hapless Iraqis hungering for freedom from the occupiers' clasp, there has not also been any dearth of Quislings ready to collaborate with the Americans bent upon prolonging their occupation now by proxy. At time, they even vie with each other in seeking favour from their foreign mentors.

The Iraqi Governing Council IGC), which was required to assist Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN's special envoy, in his mission of crafting an interim administration that was to assume power on June 30 had already been a collection of America's trusted allies. Brahimi was still in the process of consultation when troops in Iraq staying on, and tion's willingness to accept the compromised soon after Saddam's

composition of the proposed interimgovernment. Consequently, the government that followed was composed of the people -- yet remained loyal to the Americans. A mild mannered Brahimi, lacking the grit to stand up to Washington's bullying and manipulation (the reason why the Americans never opposed his choice as the UN's pointman both in Baghdad and Kabul), was apparently outmaneuvered by the US-Controlled IGC.

endorse it. Allawi's action surprised all except the Americans. The international community was equally surprised at the interim prime minister's uncalled for statement that the "sovereignty" stipulated in the UN resolution was "quite adequate.

As scepticism abounded with regard to the nature of sovereignty given to the Iraqis, prudence demanded that, in its own interest, the interim government should continued presence of American force in a "sovereign" country.

The spirit behind the muchtouted transfer of power has consistently been an exercise to hoodwink the world as much as the Iraqis. Even if, under compelling circumstances, the Americans had to transfer power in one hand, they wanted to take it back with another. This exercise required a pliant figurehead in this seat of power who would have no qualms about obliging his American mentors even to the detriment of

occupation of Kuwait in 1990 by Britain's M-16 which later passed im on to the CIA.

Along with the recently abandoned Chalabi, Allawi -- also a Shia like Chalabi -- remained on the take from the CIA for all these years, particularly since Iraq became the top foreign policy priority to Washington. Chalabi, enjoying his CIA millions in Washington as the head of the Iraqi National Congress, could worm his way into the Pentagon, and was subsequently able to drag

mass destruction in 45 minutes. Even if the Americans are able to foist their man Allawi on Iraq, he cannot, for a variety of reasons, be acceptable to the vast majority of Iraqis. Allawi's most damning handicap is his shady past. For thirty years, Allawi lived a life of plush exile in the West with no contact of any substance with the suffering Shias who toiled hard to eke out bare existence under Saddam's tyranny and the oppression of US-led sanc-

They loathed all those who claimed to represent them from their pampered shelter in the West. Allawi's only redeeming grace is that of a moderate Baathist who had the courage to show a different face of the party followers in contrast to the thuggish cult of Saddam and his

With only that, it is to be seen now how far forward he can advance even under the umbrella of American protection. But then there has never been any dearth of quislings in a country defiled by the politics of occupation.

#### PERSPECTIVES

Even if the Americans are able to foist their man Allawi on Iraq, he cannot, for a variety of reasons, be acceptable to the vast majority of Iraqis. Allawi's most damning handicap is his shady past. For thirty years, Allawi lived a life of plush exile in the West with no contact of any substance with the suffering Shias who toiled hard to eke out bare existence under Saddam's tyranny and the oppression of US-led sanctions. But then there has never been any dearth of quislings in a country defiled by the politics of occupation.

The American ploy to retain control of Iraq behind the facade of a sovereign" Iraqi government became a fail accompli when the interim prime minister Iyad Allawi and his foreign minister Hoshyan Lebari -- both longtime trusted allies of the US -- conveyed to the UNSC their acceptance of the US

have made every possible effort to dispel the impression that it would be toeing the US line. The members of the UNSC who were trying to totally discard the idea of the US troops after the power transfer, or at least to limit their stay in Iraq to the bare minimum period, were indeed baffled at the interim administranational interest. Allawi's background does vindicate his appointment as prime minister by the Americans. For the past thirteen years of his political career he has been a pampered agent of British and American intelligence agencies. A former Baathist and personal physician of Saddam Hussain, Allawi was America into its War in Iraq by feeding her with false intelligence with regards to Saddam's WMD. In the meantime, Allawi thrived in London at the head of the rival Iraqi National Accord (INA). Although Chalabi had the notoriety of being the more ambitious of the two, it was Allawi who dragged his patrons into a costly misadventure in the Ameri-

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BHSS.

## 'Failed state and Bangladesh'

MD FIROJ ALAM

TELDOM do I miss the comments and views that the Daily Star Editor pens for his newspaper or expresses elsewhere in meetings or seminars. This time I have gone through his post-editorial in The Daily Star of June 11, 2004, under the above title. In the article, Mr. Anam has drawn picture of some of the grimmer lities of this country. Like him, we too feel that the country is going backwards rather than moving ahead. I was a student during the Ershad regime. We witnessed many injustices at that time, but as Ershad ascended to power through an illegitimate process, we never expected that he would ever do anything good, and concentrated our efforts on trying to remove him from power to secure a better future for the

At last Ershad was forced from ower. We voted our own leaders and parties to state power -- first BNP, then AL, and again BNP. But has this made any significant difference to our lives? We have to remain in fear of Bangla tional, the essential services like water,
The autocratic Ershad is now Bhai. We have to see the blood of our electricity, and telephone dysfunc-

tion, terrorism, suppression of rights, etc. And his criticisms are no farce!

Mr Anam has rightly mentioned

we are a "dysfunctional state"?

that we have earned the most "pre-

cious" and "brightest" jewel in the

freedom of this country through a

bloody fight against the mighty Paki-

stani rulers. I would also like to add

here that we also fought for our lan-

guage and established our mother

tongue as a state language which is a

great achievement. We got rid of the

curse of the military regime in 1990.

But have we been really emancipated?

Anu Muhammad, poet Shamshur Rahman, and the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Mr Anwar Chowdhury. We have to mourn the

death of the popular law maker

Ahsanullah Master, former MP

Momtazuddin, and the noted journal-

ist Manik Saha and now Humayun

Kabir Balu. We still see poor people

starving to death and minorities burnt

to death. We receive reports from

Amnesty International on gross viola-

tions of human right. We see the law

enforcement agencies dysfunctional,

the parliament dysfunctional, the

lower courts of judiciary dysfunc-

with the proposition that we are a

are not a "failed state". "Failed" is a

comparative term. Its antonym is

'success". On this ground, being in the

are achieving what they wanted to

achieve. Let me clarify. In our country,

whatever they say to the people, the

main objective of those coming to

power is to serve their self interest. If

we look at the Parliament, it seems

businessmen are dominating the

house. There is a serious lack of profes-

sional politicians in the House. During

nominations, all the parties give party tickets to those who have money,

But I agree with the Editor that we

tional, and as a whole, who can argue muscle, and influence. These "businessmen" just "invest" a huge amount coming to power, they naturally try to

interest. So it is also natural that they

will little think of the people and will

little respect the people, and try to

our newspapers as instances of cor-

ruption of our lawmakers. A few

months ago, the news of corruption

over CNG auto rickshaws and the huge

overdue telephone bills of the lawmak-

ers is enough to demonstrate their

"money making" mentality. So the

government by the politicians seems

I can quote here many reports from

make money through corruption.

Alas, to prove it I must refer to the

report of TI (Transparency International) citing Bangladesh as the most corrupt country in the world. To remain in power, the government is using the whole administrative machinery (police, security branches, and civil administration) against the

Therefore, I must suggest that the state is not failed but successful because the government has achieved its objectives of remaining in power for its own benefit. At the same time I must confess (admit) that we general asses, the source of all power are "failed" because we invariably send the wrong people or the wrong political parties to the parliament who exploit us, torture us, and dishonour us all the time, by making the state "dysfunctional". We hardly find any difference between our democratic and itocratic governments.

I thank Mr Anam for writing his timely post-editorial.

Md Fire Alam is a frequent contributor to The Daily

top leadership is no longer in full

command (although Mr Advani has

improved his position). The power-

struggle among its second-rung

leaders is unresolved. They are too

many: Messrs Naidu, Mahajan,

Jaitley, and Ms Bharati and Sushma

Swaraj.

### The 'tallest leader' is a dwarf: BJP returns to hard-Hindutva

We receive reports from Amnesty International on gross violations of human right. We see the law enforcement

agencies dysfunctional, the parliament dysfunctional, the lower courts of judiciary dysfunctional, the essential

services like water, electricity, and telephone dysfunctional, and as a whole, who can argue with the proposition that



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

HE BJP's June 22-24 national executive meeting in Mumbai will go down as a story of incomprehension of and bitterness at its electoral defeat, washing of dirty linen in public, organisational disarray, ideological confusion, and leadership crisis.

The BIP has failed to understand its debacle's causes and to devise a strategy for revival. It emerged from the meeting badly mauled, with divergences between Mr Atal Behari ajpayee and Mr L.K. Advani becoming visible.

The BJP is now ripe for a virtual takeover by the RSS and its hardline

Its "tallest leader", it turns out, is only a dwarf. Mr Vajpayee's stature has shrunk to a fraction of its earlier size. Once a master tactician, he has fallen to the level of the run-of-themill politician, given to thoughtless statements and less-than-mature

Mr Vajpayee fired the first salvo Narendra Modi for the BIP's electoral losses and said the issue would tive. He was promptly rebuffed by party president M. Venkajah Najdu.

Two days later, four VHP-RSS leaders in their late 70s and 80s, led by Mr Ashok Singhal, demanded the resignation of the Vajpayee-Advani duo and a public admission that the BJP lost because "they discarded

asked the party to fix a "retirement

should demand a "retirement age".

But the cruellest irony was that their

line -- of attributing the BIP's defeat

to its departure from hardline-

Hindutva --was accepted by the

mood. He got used to having his way

-- by sulking at criticism, or by crack-

ing the whip. Last year, he made Mr

Naidu retract the vikas purush-loh

purush formulation inside 24 hours.

Earlier, he refused to sack principal

secretary-confidante Brajesh

Mr Vajpayee misread the party's

party only days later!

It's laughable that these geriatrics

Mr Vajpayee's clout derived on June 13, when he blamed Mr primarily from the Prime Ministership, and secondarily, from NDA allies. He has lost the first. The allies When Mr Vajpayee realised he had overplayed his hand, he retreated.

This shows Mr Vajpayee hasn't been serious about opposing an RSS takeover of the BJP. Or else, he would have put up a fight, by cultivating support for himself.

They are too many: Messrs Naidu, Mahajan, Jaitley, and Ms Bharati and Sushma Swaraj.

he entertained Mr Modi over break-

This is typical of Mr Vajpayee's

inconsistent behaviour -- witness

his 2000 statement declaring him-

self a swayamsevak, but then "clari-

fying" that the term meant being a

servant of the nation", or his 2002

about-turn in Goa over sacking Mr

Mr Vajpayee cannot pretend he's

"moderate". He is as steeped in

Hindutva as any other

swayamsevak. It's just that he

favours a less loud, less "in-your-

Instead, he staged a cheap stunt | The BJP trotted out question-

face", softer approach to the same goal. Even that's not acceptable to

serious introspection. Rather, it its ideological stance.

It refused to recognise that India's political coordinates have changed and it's seriously out of tune. The last election turned on two axes: livelihood issues, and rejection of ethnic-religious identity politics.

begging explanations for its defeat

like "overconfidence", "compla-

cency", and its "image" as a party

held in a 7-Star hotel where dele-

gates had access to seven restau-

Mumbai was advanced by

margadarshak Advani. The party

lost because it neglected its three-

legged "ideological constituency" of

"karyakartas, our ideological

parivar, and our social support-

drafted in Mr Modi and Ms Uma

The BJP didn't neglect this triad. It

rants, a gymnasium and sauna!

But the national executive was

The explanation that prevailed in

given to 5-star indulgence.

Bharati among its star campaigners. Mr Vajpayee shared election-rally platforms with Mr Modi more than In Mumbai, the BJP undertook no once. The RSS canvassed for the BJP door-to-door.

circular reasoning based on dogma: we lost because we didn't win, and we didn't win because we redefined ourselves, to become what we aren't. So return to hardline Hindutva and the allies will come rushing back. New ones will join in: Ajit Singh, Karunanidhi, Paswan...

The BIP is day-dreaming. It can-

not possibly retain its allies or

recruit new ones by returning to its

ideological constituency". Hard-

The BJP's past strategy of capital-

ising on public disenchantment

with the Congress cannot work

today. The public is willing to give

the Congress another chance

because it's offering a compassion-

ate government pledged to correct-

ing gross disparities and fighting

communal bigotry and fundamen-

talism. By building regional alli-

ances, the Congress has re-inserted

As the BJP moves towards strident

itselfinto the space BJP occupied.

Hindutva will scare them away.

Clarity will emerge only after the Maharashtra Assembly elections, due in September. The BJP-Shiv Sena calculates that the Ishrat "encounter" killing will polarise opinion and help communalists. This may be wishful thinking. Most people are repulsed by the "encoun-As the BIP moves towards strident communalism, its first-generation top leadership is no longer in full command ter". The Congress-NCP will do well (although Mr Advani has improved his position). The power-struggle among its second-rung leaders is unresolved. by roping in the BSP, which commands five percent of the vote.

Nationally, the BJP has lost its advantage. If it clings to hard-Hindutva, it will decline further. The UPA is making some excellent moves. The Common Minimum Programme and the National Advisory Committee are good examples.

The Committee has some outstanding members like Aruna Roy, Jean Dreze, Madhav Chavan, and N.C. Saxena. They could provide sound policy and help keep the government on course. If Mr Manmohan Singh's team handles the budget well, popular support for the UPA will surge. The BJP, then, could be consigned to the margins for a long time.

# OPINION

Hindutva-related issues." They also in Mumbai -- by saying that he asked the party to fix a "retirement age" for leaders.

in Mumbai -- by saying that he wouldn't lead the party. A day later, he said this was "a joke". Ultimately,

#### Radical Islam and America

MERICAN administrations have not addressed and perhaps did not understand the most fundamental issues of why we are at war against 'terrorism.' Why has this situation got so far out of hand? In a former age, we were right about Hitler and communism, and we produced effective plans for action. But we are not getting much in the way of insight now. Let's ask the really big question about the war that few seem to want to face, and indeed some call it unpatriotic even

to ask the question: Why are so many radical Muslims willing to die as holy warriors by attacking America?

President George W. Bush claims that 'they hate progress, and freedom, and choice, and culture, and music, and laughter, and women, Muslims who reject their distorted But there is quite a lot more to it

Radical Islamists abhor us because we have our troops and others in their holy land of Arabia. They believe we have misunderstood and humiliated them for centuries -- we are the 'crusaders.' Those collaborationist Muslims who sell out to Western values stand condemned by the extremists as well. They detest our support of semi-secular Arab regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They dislike us for grasping oil at prices favourable to America and being profligate with it. They loathe us because we give too much support to Israel and disdain the Palestinians. They despise our culture, and they scruti-

and Christians, and Jews and all nize its excesses of greed, glamour, and glitz. The lusts for sand, sea, and sex, that characterize many Americans symbolised by Las Vegas and Hollywood are anathema to their puritan way of life. Clerics reprimand the Muslim masses who occasionally like what Elvis and Madonna represent.

We continue to separate church and state, rather than allowing the moral values of religion to be infused into the nation. Banks and offices hover over churches, synagogues, and mosques. The World Trade Center represented globalisation and the subjection of their nations to a corrupt colonialist capitalism. Though they begrudge their own poverty, they see a socialistic approach as a better way forward to challenge the huge gaps of wealth that capitalism creates. For

few is an immense nightmare for the epitomises military hegemony that forces others to do what the White House cabal wants. The fourth hijacked plane was probably headed there before it was forced down in the fields of Pennsylvania.

They see their rejection as the story of Isaac and Ishmael all over again. Sarah could not conceive, so she persuaded Abraham to take her slave Hagar and have a son. Later Sarah bore Isaac and she influenced Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness with little food or water. Many Muslims believe that they too have been relegated into the wilderness by the false and decadent descendents of Abraham -- Jews and Christians.

Clearly the shaming of the pris-

them the American Dream for the oners of Abu Ghraib as well as the invasion of Iraq itself has made the situation worse, and thousands continue to volunteer for suicide bombings. Apparently we are in for a long and terrible time. Yet I think we can address some of the issues without kowtowing. We might never solve all the problems such as intolerance, women's rights, homophobia, and their dislike of modernity -but let's see how far we can go.

Get our troops out of Arabia. Actually, this is being done and the US is now saying all Americans should leave. We need to be more careful in our support of oppressive regimes. Bush has strongly stated this in a speech, but results are yet to be seen. Why can't we find a real Israel/Palestine policy? Why are we dragging our feet? Why do we hear so from the media?

We need to take Islam as a religion seriously. We may want to revise a Christian theology that has put Jesus above Moses and Muhammad. This exclusive theology was developed under the Roman Emperor Constantine and is largely nonbiblical. Perceiving the three founders of the Abrahamic faiths as equals would help a lot. Joint worship on equal terms could be a start.

Americans are seduced by a garish culture, and dumbed down TV, and Las Vegas typifies greed, glitz, and glamour. We can't outlaw this, but we can object. Discourage gas-guzzling SUV's and take away the intense influence of the oil barons on the present government. Work on alternative fuel supplies. Conserve power. Trade is not the little about the Palestinian miseries highest goal of society, and spiritual values should trump materialism. We needn't separate religion and

public life as much as we do. That concept is not in the Constitution. The First Amendment says that we shall not establish a religion, but our Founders were referring to the example of England and its state church -- they did not suggest banning religion from all public life as many courts do now.

American arrogance must be curtailed, and consultation with others is crucial. This is starting to happen because we are desperate to rebuild Iraq. That invasion, an appalling and costly mistake based on faulty predictions of WMD and a false idea of Saddam's connection with Al-Qaeda, has been a disaster, and has made the world a much more treacherous place. What happened to the Bush 41 sanctions that contained Saddam? They were University and Oxford University.

working, but neo-cons wanted total victory and rubbished the State Department. Yet trying to establish a democracy in Iraq is a pie in the sky ideology pushed by some Americans who never lived there.

I wonder about Bush's messianic character -- the President talks with God but not his Dad. Bush pursues a belief from Wilson, FDR, JFK, and Reagan who saw USA as a 'redeemer nation' and this is a biblical interpretation followed by Columbus, Winthrop, and Lincoln. But it is also biblical to lead, if we must, by example, not by force.

from us and the radical Islamists who need to revise their intolerant views of everything Western as well.

difference, but it will take courage

These moves could make a big

Charles Brock is a Lecturer in Religion, Penn State