

Crackdown on opposition

Mass arrests can never be justified

NOT five months after the government launched a similar crackdown on opposition party workers and activists, it has again initiated a country-wide mass arrest of the grass-roots level organisers of the main opposition parties. That the government would resort to this kind of heavy-handed and undemocratic tactic is neither acceptable nor politically astute.

We urged the government to give the opposition the space to fully air their grievances in parliament last week. Not only did the government choose not to permit the opposition space in parliament, it has evidently decided that it cannot afford to give the opposition space outside of parliament as well. Indeed, the fact that this latest crackdown comes on the heels of a successful human chain programme seems to indicate that the government is seeking to stifle any expression of opposition discontent.

The mass arrests raise all kinds of serious questions as to the rule of law and respect for civil rights. The mass arrests of April have now been thoroughly discredited for their excesses and for the thousands of innocent people who were thrown behind bars for no reason. It seems as though the government is intent on repeating its misstep of five months ago, and while (unlike last time) there are no reports as yet of people uninformed with politics being arrested, the targeting of opposition party activists under Section 54 and the random and arbitrary nature of the arrests make it clear that the government is once again going too far.

We have long opposed Section 54 for specifically this reason -- that it can be abused to incarcerate those whom the government deems to be troublesome without due process of law and strict evidentiary standards. This certainly seems to be the case with the current arrests.

This latest round of arrests is a huge mistake on the part of the government. Not only is it acting in an undemocratic manner that is incompatible with the precepts and ideals of this nation's constitution, but the only possible long-term result of such measures will be a further diminution of respect for the government among the general public.

It is Rahela now

Another example of extreme barbarity against women

THE unspeakable torment of Rahela Akhter, a rape victim, finally came to an end when she lost her battle against death. The poor garment worker was mugged, raped, badly mutilated and finally left in an open space on the Jahangirnagar University campus by the attackers. It was a multiple crime committed against an innocent girl, a mind-boggling example of the threats that women are exposed to in society today.

The cruelty phenomenon is cause for concern. And poor women, the most vulnerable group, have to bear the brunt of it. What is most worrying is that the criminals often go scot-free. In recent times some of them have received the punishment they deserved. But one still has the impression that a large majority are not brought to justice, many find refuge under somebody's wings, and the pace of handing out conviction where the accused has been prosecuted is too slow. When justice is not meted out, the criminals get emboldened. And that may be the reason why so many girls and women are falling victim to rape and acid throwing. When the law fails to act with due speed, its role as a deterrent is somewhat diluted.

The police have succeeded in arresting only one of the four alleged criminals named by Rahela's relatives. Given the tell-tale nature of the crime, it should not have been difficult for the police to haul them up. But as we always witness in such cases, the police seldom demonstrate seriousness or the needed agility to bring the culprits to book.

Things must improve in many areas before the vulnerable women can feel a little more secure. First, the noose of the law has to be tightened, so that nobody can escape lightly after committing culpable crimes like rape and acid throwing. Second, people should show a greater sensitivity towards the issue of women's security. Social or community resistance to oppression against women should be more pronounced. Third, the causes behind such brutalisation of society must be identified and addressed in right earnest.

The death of Rahela is not something that we have seen for the first time. It is highly regrettable that while such incidents are condemned by all, precious little is done to prevent their recurrence. The government, law enforcers and the court should get their act together against brutalisation of women. Women's rights groups are doing a good job; they must now help build social resistance against the crimes. Are our women so cheap that we can leave them to the mercy of some beasts?

"New sovereignty" and the second Bush administration

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE latest polls show President Bush either leading Senator Kerry by a considerable margin or the two in a dead heat if the election were to be held now. While President Bush is seen as an assertive and strong leader, Senator Kerry, despite his Vietnam war record, is seen as caring towards the ordinary American, but weak on security. Whether Kitty Kelley's recently published book, *The Family*, portraying the Bush family in an unflattering manner will have any effect on the voters come November remains to be seen. This article will try to assess the transnational impact if President Bush were to win re-election.

Inevitably, it will mean the continued influence of people described by Professor Peter Spiro as the "new sovereignists" - a group of highly credentialed academics who have developed "a coherent blueprint for defending American institutions against the alleged encroachment of international ones."

They argue that US sovereignty is absolute, inimitable, and unimpugned, as opposed to the sovereignty of most countries of the world that are now pooled (as in the EU), or circumscribed by international agreements. The "new sovereignists" do not apologise for and on the contrary, fully endorse US unilateralism. They find most international laws as too amorphous, intrusive on domestic affairs, and unenforceable to justify US consent.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of new sovereignty is the notion that the US can opt out of international regimes on ground of its unquestioned power. That these arguments smack of arrogance and can be proved to be invalid has not impressed their proponents. They are convinced that the wealth and might of the US market and other co-operative arrangements would compel the rest of the world to conform to American positions even if the US were to stand aloof from various international undertakings.

It should, however, be understood that the new sovereignists are neither isolationists nor are they

opposed to international engagements. Confident of unparalleled economic and military might, they advocate an international order that would suit American preferences.

While new sovereignists demand American exceptions from subordination to international law, there is a growing global awareness that greater dependence among countries of the world has transformed the Westphalian concept of sovereignty. David Held of the London School of Economics

renounces these interests in the name of sovereignty, it loses its rights and obligations of sovereignty. This concept is coterminous with Tony Blair's doctrine of International Community, which recognises the mutual dependence of states in pursuit of shared goals and values, democracy and human rights being core goals and values. Blair recognised the centrality of the UN in a world ruled by law and international co-operation. However, he called for reforms, particularly of the Security Council, and advocated the need for humanitarian intervention because "acts of genocide can never be a purely internal matter" as human rights abuse results in massive flows of refugees into neighbouring states and "threaten international peace and security."

Tracing the continuum of change in the post-9/11 era, Japanese analyst Akio Watanabe spoke of European disagreement with the American tendency towards unilateral and overly militaristic solutions as well as with the disregard for international law and organisations over the Iraq invasion and its aftermath. Watanabe saw European opposition to US leadership in the post-Cold War era, or more recently, in the post-9/11 era during D-Day

commemorations and the G-8 summit's reemphasis on transatlantic partnership. But playing the role of a counterweight to American machismo in the teeth of American opposition may prove to be impossible.

Robert Kagan argues that the transatlantic problem is not a George Bush problem, but a power problem. American military strength, Kagan writes, has produced a propensity to use that strength, while Europe's weakness has resulted in its aversion to the

dignity, rule of law, limits on absolute power of the state, free speech, religious and ethnic tolerance, etc.

But these words appear to be hollow if one considers the sadism of the Abu Ghraib prison, the fact that Kofi Annan termed the Iraq war as illegal, as well as US use of religious profiling, which demonstrate religious intolerance.

One must also remind oneself of Donald Rumsfeld's dismissal of the European disagreement with war on Iraq as a quixotic objection by "old Europe." The second Bush adminis-

tration is likely to woo "new Europe" consisting of the fresh entrants into NATO, who have taken out newspaper advertisements in support of the Anglo-American misadventure in Iraq. US advocacy of European expansion, including Turkey, was frowned upon by the EU-15 countries as interference in Europe's internal affairs. But the new entrants into NATO and EU remain expectant of a continued American shield. Their expectation from the US is also for new economic opportunities that results from the competitive advantage they have over the US and EU-15 countries as far as low cost of production.

Perhaps President Clinton's National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, is right in saying that the real clash of civilisation is taking place in Washington between Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld on the diametrically opposed conceptions of America's role in the world. The real battle is between liberal internationalists in both the Republican and Democratic parties who believe that US strength is greatest when it works in concert with allies in defence of shared values and interests and those who believe that the US should go it alone or not at all. The internationalists believe that the US which "bestrides the globe

like a colossus" has never enjoyed so much power, yet yields so little influence.

To correct this paradox, Joseph Nye suggests using soft power -- the ability to shape the political agenda in a way that shapes the preference of others as opposed to hard power in the form of military and economic might. But if the experiences of the first Bush administration are anything to go by, then it is difficult to foresee that the second Bush administration would be persuaded by the notion that America's natural allies are more likely to be persuaded by the power of American argument than by the argument of American power.

In this case, the transatlantic chasm is likely to widen fuelled by factors identified by Harvard Professor Stephen Walt as follows: (a) the rise of "successor" generation in Europe who do not share their predecessors' Atlanticism forged during the Cold War, (b) the growing commercial competition between Europe and the US, and (c) the cultural divide reflected in Europe's contempt for American culture.

On the other hand, the new sovereignists view the European tendency to abide by international law as contemptible and reflective of European military weakness. Robert Kagan has summed up this transatlantic divergence of views by warning that it was time to stop pretending that Europe and America share a common view of the world.

Should George Bush win re-election, as is assumed in this article, then the world for the sake of its own peace and security will have to replace the unilateralism currently being practiced by multilateralism. The realist approach will demand that this multilateralism be exercised by the major powers and/or major groups. But in the exercise of multilateralism, the voice and interest of the developing countries have to be incorporated. Otherwise international peace and security will remain elusive.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a Secretary and Ambassador.

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observes that our mutual interconnectedness and vulnerability has grown so rapidly that we no longer live "in a world of discreet national communities. Instead we live in a world of overlapping communities of fate where trajectories of other countries are heavily enmeshed with each other." Held asserts that any assumption of sovereignty as being an indivisible, inimitable, exclusive, and perpetual form of public power is now defunct. Accordingly, states, along with the communities they embody, can be judged by a generally accepted standard of civilised behaviour.

The Bush administration's enunciation of the doctrine of pre-emption and its use in Iraq, however much contested in the UNSC and by international jurists, has severed the concept of sovereignty. Though the threat of WMDs was advanced as the *raison d'être* of the Iraq invasion, the real reason for the attack, as President Bush now publicly admits, was regime change. Though the brutality of the Saddam regime is not contested, the Iraq invasion has proved that the internationally acceptable behaviour of a government is now an essential condition for the exercise of sovereignty.

Paul Taylor of the London School of Economics, analysing the dialec-

tical quality of sovereignty in the post-Cold War period, observes that sovereignty is increasingly being seen as tied to a state's obligation to be accountable to the international community. Being licensed to practice as a state, Taylor adds, carries with it the condition that the government must be prepared to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the international community, continued adherence to the terms under which it holds the license. In other words, a government is the ultimate guardian of popular interest and if it

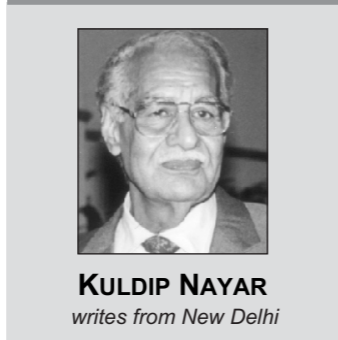
exercised military power. Kagan goes a little further in portraying European fear of American unilateralism in arguing that it may perpetuate a Hobbesian world in which Europe becomes increasingly vulnerable.

But Joseph Nye of Harvard university warns of the danger of Kagan's philosophy. Throughout history, Nye says, a coalition of countries have arisen to balance a dominant power. He suspects that the search for new state challengers may very well be under way. In this melee, the loss of Europe's centrality in the American security matrix is often forgotten. But Colin Powell assured the Europeans and others of the Bush administration's strategy of partnership that strongly affirms the vital role of NATO and other US alliances including the UN. He further assured that pre-emption would apply only to non-state actors/terrorists and pre-emption was not meant to replace deterrence. Colin Powell denied that Bush administration's strategy was unilateralist by design, imbalanced in favour of militarism, obsessed with terrorism and hence biased towards pre-emptive war on a global scale. He expressed President Bush's strong determination not to negotiate demands of human

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Game of one-upmanship



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

MEETING at the summit between India and Pakistan, whether on the sidelines of the UN or in formal surroundings, is always welcome. It indicates that the two countries have journeyed, going on still towards normalisation. It sustains hope that persistent meetings may span the distance between the two one day, however hard it may look at present.

The important point is that the talks should continue. America and the then Soviet Union did not stop talking even at the height of the cold war. Representatives of the two countries would secretly meet at one place or the other and keep the dialogue going. India and Pakistan should have done this after independence.

However, the interview by President General Pervez Musharraf to Washington Post a couple of days before meeting the Indian Prime Minister appears to take the entire process to square one. He has said that Pakistan does not go along with the Indian idea to put off the substantive discussions on Kashmir in favour of short-term confidence building measures. This means Kashmir first and other steps later.

We have gone over this exercise earlier without any result.

Status quo is not the answer, says Musharraf. But there is no option until the two countries sort out the problems between them. The status quo, that is the Line of Control, can be modified as indicated in Dr Manmohan Singh's interview to the Time magazine. The report has naturally been denied. But there could be something in it.

I recall after the Tashkent agreement in 1966 Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin asked Prime Minister Lal

LoC with minor adjustments as a permanent border." The Pakistan establishment denies this. But there is enough evidence to indicate that Bhutto gave such an understanding. Musharraf's statement to "take the bull by its horns" sounds odd when the ground has not been prepared.

New Delhi's unilateral relaxation of visa restrictions is a step in the right direction. Only people-to-people contact will remove the distrust which is the core of the problem. Why couldn't New Delhi relax visa restrictions many years

earlier? The Shima agreement in 1972 gave it an opportunity. But the mania of reciprocity has obsessed New Delhi so much that it inch-tapes the stride Pakistan takes to determine the response.

Even the relaxation, I fear, may not be implemented on the ground. New Delhi has genuine problem of infiltration because the Pakistan policy to send militants into India has been relaxed, not renounced. Only a few days ago did the Army chief say: "500 militants are waiting in the wings to cross over to Jammu and Kashmir." If this goes on how can there be a climate for a settlement?

Easy travel is welcome but the trade is the one which establishes

the real bond. Lifting the restrictions on import of goods from Pakistan unilaterally would have created a stir in that country. It is the economic activity that develops a vested interest which becomes the sinews of peace. People resent the snapping because their livelihood depends on ties. If a list were to be prepared of what the two countries should have done but did not do, it would run into many pages and indicate missed opportunities. That is the reason why I fail to understand Islamabad's persistent 'no' to India's

member. Were Pakistan to shed its hostility, it would realise that New Delhi in the Council would be a source of strength to South Asia. Pakistan should recall how New Delhi withdrew its objection to Islamabad becoming an observer at the ASEAN and how it okayed its membership to the Commonwealth although Pakistan continued to be a one-legged democracy. However, I admit that Delhi's opposition was wrong in the first instance. Personal pique should never dictate policies

War, the importance of countries was different from today. Keeping India out and allowing the UK and France to be permanent members does not make sense.

Coming to Kashmir, the path the two countries have taken so far does not lead them to the stage where a solution is possible. From the days of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President General Ayub Khan, the effort has been to talk at the top and see if some solution can come about. Parleys between Lal Bahadur Shastri and Ayub, Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Inder Gujral and Nawaz Sharif and Atal Behari Vajpayee and Musharraf were at the top. The solution has to be built from below where the desire of the people to live in peace is strong. In fact, officials particularly and ministers in general have tangled the problem still further because their purpose is to show political one-upmanship, not to face the reality. People nominated to Track Two are cleared by New Delhi and Islamabad. How can they have a different approach? The new formulas that have emerged away from religion and regionalism are the ones which are based on the people-to-people contacts. The process will accelerate once travel and trade are liberalised and allowed to touch all tiers of activities. Ultimately, not only India and Pakistan but the entire South Asia, from Afghanistan to Myanmar, should become one economic union, beyond borders and beyond bickering. Kashmir will come to submerge in that scenario.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BE TWEEN THE LINES

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Bahadur Shastri to solve the Kashmir problem as well. He agreed and talked to Lt Gen Kumaramangalam, then India's chief of the army staff designate. Shastri told Kosygin that India would be willing to make some adjustment in the ceasefire line and give some territory of the state to Pakistan. Kosygin conveyed Shastri's offer to Ayub. He did not reject it and said he would consider it and give his reply later. He never did.

Humayun Khan, Pakistan's former High Commissioner to India, has also revealed in a book: "Zulfikar Ali Bhutto convincingly argued with Indira Gandhi at Shimla that given enough time, he would be able to make Pakistan accept the

permanent membership of the Security Council. Granted suspicion has crusted into layers of hostility and most Pakistanis genuinely believe that New Delhi may influence the decision on Kashmir once it sits in the array of Council's permanent members. It does not happen that way. New Delhi by itself can hardly do anything.

If Pakistan is keen on straightening things with India, then why continue with the same old obduracy? What can New Delhi do if it becomes a permanent member? America is firmly behind Pakistan. No member, not even Russia, has anything against Pakistan for New Delhi to exploit. India gets no advantage on Kashmir if it is a

because they are unproductive. India's membership of the Council is, however, dependent on Washington. It may one day support the proposition for some reason or the other. What will Pakistan do then? It should know that international politics works enigmatically. At present Islamabad is in a position to show the gesture and even propose India's name.

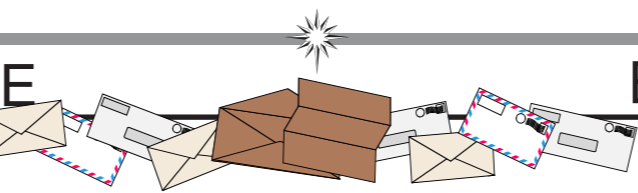
Islamabad believes that Kashmir should be solved before India gets the membership. None objects to that. But even if there is no settlement it does not mean that the region with two billion people should be denied a place on the body which has become lopsided. When it was founded after the Second World

War, the importance of countries was different from today. Keeping India out and allowing the UK and France to be permanent members does not make sense.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

No more politics

We, the general students of Dhaka University, are politically victimised. Our future is really in jeopardy. Our academic life has been paralysed by the frequency of student strike. We do not know when we will say goodbye to our dear campus. Sadly, we are passing our life in political quagmire. We are very serious to finish our academic life but fortune does not favour us. Students leaders, our so-called custodians, are very much callous to our career. Recently, the BCL has become very reckless in its political movement. They are very indifferent to the welfare of the students. Most student leaders are not real students. So they cannot realise the bitterness of session jam. They have no right to pulverise the life of the bona fide students to toe the line of mainstream political parties.

Personally I am very much pessimistic and frustrated about my uncertain future. I do not know why the authority is sitting on the fence. I

implore the political leaders to salvage our career. We ladies have been promoted in Bangladesh for nearly 30 years but until the end of the 1980s they won little acceptance amongst the majority of the population. The situation has remained static since the mid-1990s.

We know that mostly rural Bangladeshi households still use unhealthy, hanging latrines. However, you would be surprised to know that the posh areas of Dhaka Metropolitan City also are not excluded from this practice. The public park in front of the National Shooting Club in Gulshan-1 has been converted to a slum where several hundred-sweeper families were accommodated illegally and 100% of those people have no access to safe water and latrine. All the dwellers here are forced to use the lake as a collective latrine. At least 2-3 dozens of hanging latrines have been built by the side of the Niketan (Gulshan-1) lake, - with precarious bamboo plat forms raised a few feet above the

water and screened by rags. The dwellers discharge some metric tons of faeces into the lake every year. The smell is appalling; the entire lake water almost turns to human faeces. During the recent flood the entire Niketan was inundated, the floodwater transformed life of the dwellers into a watery hell. This unhealthy situation contributes to waterborne diseases like diarrhoea among children every year and causes many deaths.

The authorities should take proper action to get rid of this man-made hazard with immediate effect in order to protect the population of Niketan and Gulshan.

Mozibur Rahman
Dhaka

BTV

BTV has graduated itself to BTV World with all the same boring programmes and the 'blessed' rather than 'talented' actors and performers. The news is the most entertaining programme which gives the feeling I

am living in Utopia and trying not get washed away by the tides of development.

I was particularly irritated during the live telecast of the ICC Champions Trophy. During the interval the annoying ads were invading the first ball of every over, thanks to the time management of the concerned people. Ads deprived us the slow motion of some important events. The most irritating part was the discussion of the experts during the intervals. The original commentary was missing frequently, but the harsh voice of our 'experts' was aired with most sincere efforts.

Joy
Dhaka

Response to Nur Jahan

Ms. Jahan, I share the same concern as you do. The anxiety produced by the AL leaders is primitive and totally clashes with democratic

values. Recent speeches by the AL leaders have shown little support for the newly born democracy in our country. If anything goes wrong in the country, the first thing the AL leaders do is blame the government and threaten to overthrow the government. They tend to make things worse by calling hartals. I hope they come to realise that "threats" as the one that Abdul Jalil made do not appeal to people any more. They may gather a few hoodlums to participate in destruction of national properties but they will not get any decent individual joining them. It is the 21st century crying out loud. Riots, trump cards, and hartals will not take the AL anywhere. I believe the AL has some great values that the current leadership is evading. It would be a dream come true to see the AL take a peaceful approach for a change.

Russel Siddique

On e-mail

Terrorist attacks
As a citizen, I am fast losing faith in the views expressed by the majority of the politicians (presumptions, opinions, statements, accusations, presumptions and mud-slinging).

The bomb attack on the public meeting on 21 August could be sponsored and subsidised (to be probed) by powerful foreign groups who are taking advantage of the anti-Islamic propaganda, to gain control of Bangladesh as a strategic location for the regional control of a big market, as also the energy natural resources in S Asia and Myanmar (Bay zone). Two member nations of Saarc are already under the control of one foreign group. The latter's blueprints are familiar since the beginning of the last century.

We badly need political consensus at the national level (missing for three decades since independence). The present political culture is totally unsuited for development of the

country, and for the MPs to gain the confidence of the public.

A new cadre of political leadership is needed, having the backing of honest citizens, who are transparent in their attitude and policy-making. Corruption does more damage than terrorist gun-power. The deadliest enemies are the hypocritical politicians who use up the majority of their energies in self-stabilisation.

Abdali
Dhaka

Institutional weakness and political crisis

I strongly condemn the attack on the leader of the opposition. The opposition is an integral part of a parliamentary system.

In the political system of Bangladesh, various social groups are active now. These social forces often are testing governmental capacity by bombing and using other tactics. Not

only that, they are trying to destroy the democratic culture by replacing the government through unconstitutional means. For this reason, I argue, political sectors must be more powerful than the social forces. Immediately the government should take proper steps to strengthen the institutions which lack efficiency adaptability, autonomy and coherence.

It is the constitutional duty of the government to provide security of life, liberty and property of the citizens. Actually, democracy maximises freedom, equality and human rights. We do not need the politicised institutions. But we need the real professional institutions to ensure a true democratic polity. Institutional development is also essential for good governance.

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