

## Direct funding of UPs

### Astep in the right direction

IT is heartening to note that the government has responded positively to a longstanding demand of the elected grassroots leaders, our development partners and local self-government experts for a direct financing of development projects at the 4500 Union Parishads.

This major policy decision taken by the government has ample merit, so much so that one wonders why the cumbersome two tier system of centrally allocating funds to the UPs and releasing money through the Upazila Chairmen, let alone the interfering role of the MPs in between, has hitherto been in vogue! First and foremost, the change represents devolution of power in a concrete and tangible manner. None would be in a position now to pull the purse strings. Resultantly, the UPs will be in effective charge of planning, approving and implementing projects. The delays entailed in the approval and execution of projects should be obviated from now on. Direct funding would help reduce corruption and eliminate the possibility of cost escalation in project implementation.

Let the UP leaders not lose sight of the fact, however that the welcome shift in the funding policy actually sets the ball rolling into their court in terms of the increased responsibility devolving on them to make an optimal utilisation of the funds being placed at their disposal. They cannot anymore complain of corruption which had earlier been resorted to by the vested quarters when it came to securing allocation and release of money for the UPs.

Now that the UPs' demand for direct financing has been met, they should feel obligated to prove equal to the task and strive to give the people the value for their money. Their procedures must be fully transparent. Our suggestion is that they make it a point to furnish details of allocations made to projects and money utilisation patterns to the public on a regular basis. Why not add income data to the display chart?

To ensure maximum transparency, it is incumbent on the local self-government ministry and the Union Parishad leadership to evolve foolproof auditing mechanisms. It is also highly imperative that there is a uniformly applied criterion for money allocations so that the latter are devoid of any partisan considerations.

## Tampered mark sheet, tainted image

### Asad day for the judiciary

OF all the organs of the government and the state the judiciary is one that is held highest in public esteem in Bangladesh. It is considered as the last resort of individuals seeking personal redress as well as of the nation in times of national crises. One such instance was when the Chief Justice was appointed head of the Caretaker Government to conduct a fair and impartial election.

In the eyes of the common man the judiciary occupied a very high pedestal. But the alleged tampering with the exam mark sheet by a recently appointed additional judge of the High Court, being reflective of lack of integrity, has sullied the image of our judiciary and tainted the lawyers' profession. We recall with dismay the removal from office of an Additional Judge of the Supreme Court High Court Division in April this year for gross misconduct.

Interestingly, the incident of the alleged tampering has come to light after almost fifteen years of the said person's induction into the Bar. Why has it taken so long for this dishonorable act to come to light? The onus of ascertaining the authenticity of a person's educational and other relevant documents is that of the appointing authority. Can the Bar Council that inducted the lawyer absolve itself of the responsibility of failing to check on his credentials?

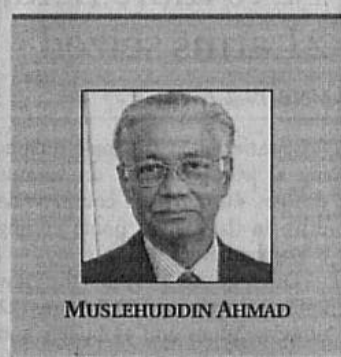
It seems that the act of interpolation of mark sheets is not unique to this instance only. As many as 111 such cases of mark sheet tampering have come to the spotlight in seven law colleges under Chittagong University. And several practicing lawyers of Comilla bar have found their names in the dubious mark sheet-tampering list.

It would be wrong to see the issue as being a matter between pro and anti government members of the Bar Council. The fact is that the issue has undermined the credibility of the highest judiciary. The Supreme Court and the High Court are the institutions of the last resort and their credibility is due as much to the sagacity of their judgments as to the personal integrity of the judges.

It was time the relevant authorities did some soul searching and considered seriously the need for reviewing the entire process of judicial selection and appointment.

This has to be done soon if the judiciary and the country are to be spared any such embarrassment in the future.

# Let the opposition prove it can do better if elected



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

THE Opposition has already lost three years of their term by boycotting the Parliament, calling repeated hartals (civil societies, trade and professional bodies pleaded for respite from hartals which Opposition leaders promised not to resort to even if they lose the election) to the detriment of the country's economy which has already been suffering under unlimited corruption (stood first for the fourth time in a row though many disputed it's very method of collection of information and indeed protested its perception of corruption of a nation as a whole) and mismanagement and causing immense sufferings to the toiling mass who depend on daily earnings, causing serious disruptions in the civil life etc. Well, the argument that hartal is a democratic process does not seem valid as any hartal which means strike needs to go through a majority decision of the striking people, which is not the case here in Bangladesh. Indeed great majority of the people oppose hartal and this has made the party(s) really unpopular among the people. Frankly speaking, people now-a-days hate hartal calls.

Though a lot of time has been wasted, the people of Bangladesh do appreciate the decision of AL policy makers to rejoin the parliament on October 28 and also for participating in all committees. Anyway, better late than never. One praise-

worthy development that the people should take note of is the frank and open call by many AL law makers to go back to the parliament, which the leadership could not ignore. This shows maturity of the leadership and their understanding of the realities on the ground and also onset of the democratic process within the party itself. Such a development should augur well for other major parties too. Unless democracy is established within the parties, one cannot practice democracy

each other for the attack thus confusing the people engaged in the investigation. Normally such investigation should have been ordered in consultation with the affected party i.e. the Opposition, but unfortunately nothing of the sort happened and hence this created further dissatisfaction among the Opposition parties. This also gave them more ammunition and further opportunities to reiterate their previous demand for the government's resignation. The government

Now the political parties have to take the full responsibilities for such a miserable and sickening situation as they are the ones who come by turn to govern the country. No one party so far involved in the country's governance can say that they are not to blame. The people of Bangladesh have seen them since Liberation. So it's time for them to rectify and salvage the country's good name. We were certainly not like this before, but why are we so now? Who are responsible -- the successive

power. Public memory is short but it's not that short. Therefore, instead of spending energy on a practically unachievable programme to topple the present government which would last practically for about another year and a half, better course for the Opposition would be to concentrate on what it (they) can offer to the people and how these would be better than what the present government has been offering. Just see what John Kerry is offering to the Americans against Bush's

parliament whenever the chance comes. Boycott and consequent hartals do not affect the ruling party; these seriously affect the people. In any case, people do note the undemocratic behaviour of the ruling party whenever it behaves that way and this would go against the ruling party when it goes for fresh mandate. This is how the democratic process should work.

What is the guarantee that the next losing party will not resort to same tactics -- boycott of parliament, hartals, mastanisms leading to terrorism etc? This time the people will ask for firm and solemn commitment of the election seekers that they will not deceive the people any more by boycotting the parliament and resorting to hartals.

Two years will be necessary to make preparations of their plans and programmes and placing them effectively to the people. The people would expect the political parties to work hard and go for serious debates on various issues that are important for the people and the nation.

Though ours is a parliamentary democracy, we may ask the party chiefs to go for open debates on major issues including economic ones confronting the country. There should be subject based pin pointed debates as done in the United States. This will help people to know the quality of the leaders of the major parties and their knowledge about the issues they are supposed to handle.

The duration of five years for a party(s) to run the country is too much. It is necessary now under the present situation to bring it to four years. This will reduce the tension among the losing parties and the call for midterm election may be less frequent.

Muslehuddin Ahmad, a former Secretary and Ambassador, is Chairman of Civic Watch-Bangladesh.

**The Opposition members are often not allowed enough time to speak and or even their request for debates on important national issues are, at times, rejected, but these would have to be sorted out and projected within the parliament whenever the chance comes. Boycott and consequent hartals do not affect the ruling party; these seriously affect the people. In any case, people do note the undemocratic behaviour of the ruling party whenever it behaves that way and this would go against the ruling party when it goes for fresh mandate.**

in the wider national political context. The political parties need to be really conscious about it if we want to make it a democratic country worth the name.

It's really a dangerous practice to leave the final decision making authority to the party chief(s). This happens only in dictatorial regimes as there are always innumerable stooges to support a dictator. In fact, no party chief should take the burden of taking country's or even party's major decisions upon himself/herself. It's too dangerous as individuals are more likely to make wrong decisions. All important decisions should be taken on democratic basis involving majority members.

The horrible and universally condemnable grenade attack on the Opposition leaders that killed a dedicated political personality and many others created further chaos in the already volatile situation. Instead of allowing appropriate investigation in the matter, the political parties -- one in power and the other in opposition -- blamed

also took the stand that the Opposition was not interested in the investigation; it had the political motive behind i.e. the resignation of the government. The reply from the ruling party was obvious, it said it would not resign even a day before its term expires. Thus the country's politics is in total turmoil.

Then the flood and thereafter the torrential rain that partly destroyed the crop and much of the seasonal vegetables. This would have raised the prices somewhat due to reduced supplies, but the situation has been made unbearable by the gangs involved in collecting unauthorised tolls at several transit points and unscrupulous traders hoarding stocks. Here comes the government's role in terms of dealing with such roustages. But the whole thing goes back to the same old story -- 'lack of effective governance' in practical and real terms. The so-called unholy links of Mastans and those roustage elements with some important political parties make the task of the law enforcing agencies extremely difficult.

governments? Time has come to perhaps privatise the government itself. Elections should take place only to elect the law makers who will sit in the Parliament and frame laws; they should not be involved in running the business of the government. The idea may sound funny, but the time has come to go for such unprecedented steps.

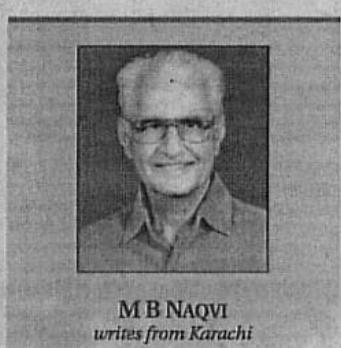
I for one still have faith in our people. The leaders of country's political parties were not like this before. Some probably are beyond any correction as they are always afraid of losing their present or potential political positions but the great majority of our leaders are still capable of working honestly to bring back the country's good image. Enough is enough. Please for God's sake, change your plans and programmes and tactics to gain the right to govern. Once a party is in power, it must not forget that it has to go back to the people once its term expires.

So far as the Opposition is concerned, it should also recall its previous performances while it was in

programme; it's a big debate on all issues that concern the Americans. Though election fraud cannot be ruled out (ref. last American election and Florida voting mess), which Americans are already worried about, but the very campaigns are praiseworthy as these are bringing out almost everything to the forefront so that the people know the leaders and their capabilities and above all their programmes for the people.

Why another election when successive Oppositions boycotted the parliament thus completely ignoring the right of the people of Bangladesh to have their cases presented to the parliament by their elected members? What benefit the people get when the elected members boycott the parliament but continue to draw the pay and allowances as members? Yes, the Opposition members are often not allowed enough time to speak and or even their request for debates on important national issues are, at times, rejected, but these would have to be sorted out and projected within the

# A result we know already



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

IT is too early to know the actual result of American Presidential and parts of parliamentary elections; in our parts, these results will start coming in early this Wednesday (today). No matter, we can be sure of, some of the results. Whether George W. retains his job or Kerry makes to the White House, there is no difficulty in discerning the broad thrust of policies that will be pursued by Uncle Sam.

Thus, the Iraq war is not about to be wound up. It will be pursued with renewed zeal. If Kerry flies past the winning post he will try to rope in a few other nations to share the human cost of American occupation. Bush will muddle on and favoured sectors of Corporate America will go on rolling in profits. The US has meant to reshape the Middle East; that may change marginally but not substantially; but keeping Iraq under occupation for larger American purposes is not likely to be affected.

In the Arab-Israeli dispute no change need be expected from either contender to the Presidential gaddi. In a way, it is possible to say that the real winner of Nov 2 will be Ariel Sharon's Israel no matter if American President's name on Nov 3 is Bush or Kerry. Depending upon Israeli politics, Sharon's plans will go on being supported by American government. The much betrayed Palestinians had better make themselves ready for whatever Final

Solution Sharon has in mind of the Palestine Problem. The US is sure to go along with it.

Logically, no significant change can be expected in the US policy towards Afghanistan. Here too this or that Karzai will be kept in 'power'. Pakistan will continue to be asked 'to do more' -- regarding both al-Qaeda and Taliban. Islamabad may expect more money from the US for specific purposes like reforming religious curricula or for better tackling of terrorism or for carrying

South China Sea. It is good to be well placed with good supply lines. South Asia and Afghanistan are an enabling role to sustain the US while it engages in its myriad chores of a hyper power. Bush or Kerry the work will be the same.

One thing is also certain, no matter who wins the US Presidency on Tuesday: either contender will go on working hard to forge an ever expanding military cooperation with India; that is what a strategic relationship comprises. But the

busting and that son of Star Wars, the anti-ballistic missile defence. It is aggressively selling this new defence against missiles to Tokyo, Taipei and New Delhi. The basis of American power is the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, making these the currency of power and influence. Why should other deny themselves of what is kosher for America of both Bush and Kerry?

Then there are three special cases of Israel, South Korean experiments and of what India has been doing,

ent face, though there is no realistic likelihood of American preventive action; its cost will be too high and success may not be assured through a short, sharp intervention. North Korea is too complicated a case; in any case, nobody knows how Russia and China will behave if the US mounted an invasion. But an adequately rearm Japan -- an apparent objective of US policy being propagated by US media -- can be relied upon to tackle that. What is the difference in the approaches of

money. But its track record is not good in American eyes. That is because of Pakistani rulers' obsession with Kashmir; it is prone to go on squabbling with India. Which may be the reason why Gen. Musharraf is going flat out for a permanent settlement with India quickly. That will cement Pak-US ties. In any case, Musharraf has some leeway because the US need for Pakistan's cooperation is unlikely to go away, Bush or Kerry.

What we do not know is how America's domestic issues will fare under Bush or Kerry. Even here there are some semi-certainties. Economic paradigm of low taxes and pruning of social sector expenditures is unlikely to be ended even under Kerry, though there will be a lot of talk about changing some aspects of social security, health and education sectors. But lack of support in Congress is likely to stymie him while Bush is a known category. Strong continuation can be expected on domestic security; there can be no let up on that. Only style and rhetoric are likely to change with Kerry. American economy's health is being debated; so far no one seems to have a panacea for its ills. Kerry may also show greater awareness of the outside world.

There are also few moot issues: Kerry, if elected, may try to make US adhere to Kyoto accord of 1997. There may be renewed rhetoric on the need for more anti-missile defence if Bush returns to White House. Kerry can be suspected to start talking of some nuclear disarmament with Russia, though not with anyone else in Europe, Israel or China -- Pakistan may be the main exception among known nuclear powers. But that will be superficial -- for political purposes. They used to say Kerry will care more for the UN and international law. But that was an unfounded expectation. Both scions of rich families will go on deferring to special interests that will have helped put one of them in power.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

**PLAIN WORDS**

**Needless to say the broad outlines of US policies vis-à-vis the third world are likely to stay the same; that is a near certainty. As for Pakistan, the ruling establishment need not worry. The need for bases in this country, thanks to its location, will keep it in power -- and money. But its track record is not good in American eyes. That is because of Pakistani rulers' obsession with Kashmir; it is prone to go on squabbling with India. Which may be the reason why Gen. Musharraf is going flat out for a permanent settlement with India quickly. That will cement Pak-US ties.**

out CBMs with India, especially in Kashmir.

But the Afghans are unlikely to see the departure of American troops, not that NATO can extricate its troops easily. US cooperation is for unlimited period, irrespective of the state of security or stability of the political system there. Ergo occupation of the four or more Pakistani bases by the US will go on. The network of American bases in the ME, the fleets in Persian Gulf and Pakistan bases are meant to be a solid rear for US forces in Central and other parts of Asia, now thinly spread out.

America inevitably has a lot of business to transact in Caucasus and Central Asia: Oil, other minerals, chances of investments, likely military purchases by some former Soviet republics beckon and of course there are the strategic purposes. A lot of possible geopolitical action would seem to impend in Russia, China, Korean Peninsula,

course of love, war and strategic relations never run smooth; hurdles and hiccups can be expected. But no breakdown seems likely. Pakistanis, important enough for their assigned role and location, will have to adjust to it. The recent sense of urgency in President Musharraf's campaign of making Pakistanis think outside the box on Kashmir may be related to America's own roadmap for Asia. It will stay the same for Bush or Kerry.

Of particular interest to Pakistan is the near certainty of the US making non-proliferation of nuclear weapons the main thrust of its declaratory policies. The AQ Khan story is not dead; it will continue to be used to keep Pakistan in line. It is likely to prove a good lever to pressurise the country. As far as non-proliferation campaign is concerned, it is shot through and through with contradictions: the US is constantly engaged in proliferation, vertical as well as horizontal: new nuclear ammo for bunker

Contrast American attitudes to those three with its stance vis-à-vis the Axis of Evil: Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Libya has done a South Africa and has become respectable. Iraq was severely punished for a crime it had expiated for under IAEA's urgings some time ago. Israel remains the darling of the US and its nuclear stockpiles -- thought to be larger than Britain's or France's -- apparently cause no worry to any democratic -- read white -- country. The US protection of it, despite its horrible transgressions of Palestinians' human rights and proliferation, remains the cornerstone of US ME policy. Some hold that the whole US foreign policy is being driven by concern for Israel. Kerry has no new list of priorities that vitally differs from Bush's.

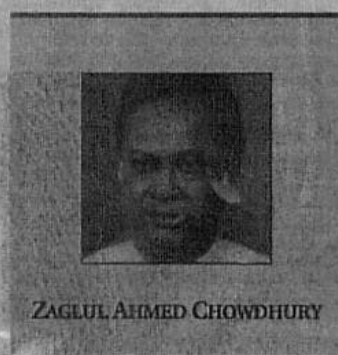
But apparently some sins cannot be atoned for. One such is being committed by North Korea and another is sought to be committed by Iran. Here the US shows a differ-

Bush or Kerry for solving these crises?

China is a resurgent power; it largely remains an unknown factor. Bush or Kerry, the present mix of US policy is unlikely to change soon. Strategic moves apart, China is to be integrated into the world economy and US wants a share in the cake of the huge profits to be had from the Chinese market. The US cultivation of Taiwan and Tokyo's going nuclear -- the American media's prescription -- may be for 'just in case'. But the American moves in Northeast Asia as well as Central Asia are well worth watching and none of these are likely to be affected by the Nov 2 election results.

Needless to say the broad outlines of US policies vis-à-vis the third world are likely to stay the same; that is a near certainty. As for Pakistan, the ruling establishment need not worry. The need for bases in this country, thanks to its location, will keep it in power -- and

# How the world looks at the US election?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE elections for the much-awaited presidency of the United States are just over. The electioneering reached a crescendo with two main contestants sparing no efforts to woo the voters across the vast nation comprising 50 component states and the district of Columbia. The outcome of the race in world's strongest democracy is decided by an electoral college which does not exactly mirror the popular votes won by the participants in the race that would pick up arguably the most important person in present world's only super power and in the

process certainly the most influential political position in the earth. As the chief executive of the United States, definitely the American president wields tremendous power in the global arena and admittedly enjoys great clout in the international affairs.

One particular administration or its policies may spawn controversy at varying degrees depending on certain issues, but there is hardly any scope to dispute the near-unassailable influence of Washington in the global affairs. This has been further reinforced by certain recent developments that have caught world attention and unquestionably the Iraq crisis is at the top of all of them. The United States saw to it that its scheme of things is implemented no matter who supported or opposed. Even if by-passed the United Nations in launching all out military assault in Iraq early last year and paid scant importance to the sentiments of its European allies France and Germany. The new-found democracy in the form of Russian federation also could not cut much ice while socialist China also did not approve

**MATTERS AROUND US**

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American aggressive role in Iraq but nothing could deter president George W. Bush to abandon his military operation with the support of some allies like the Britain and Australia. This brings into sharp focus how the writ of the United States runs and finally it is Bush administration which carried its scheme through regardless of the views of the rest of the world -- albeit American perception that a number of countries stood by Washington in its Iraq policy.

That America virtually turned a Nelson's eye to sentiments of a vast majority of nations in launching the armed adventure against a much weakened country hardly needs elaboration. One does not need to overstress the fact that military action was not a policy that

had broad support of the international community, this time against Saddam Hussain regime. In the earlier Gulf war, sparked by Iraq's occupation of its northern tiny oil-rich nation Kuwait, world's most countries supported the action as illegal annexation of Kuwait by sheer force had thrown international laws and ethics to the wind. This time the case is different as most saw the United States -- leader of the democratic world -- shaped the affairs in Iraq as it wanted by sheer military might. And this was done with considerable opposition in the United States itself while massive anti-war demonstrations in Britain and Australia were not lost insight.

The point that is being driven home by all these illustrations is that

American presidency is such a powerful position that it can effectively bring about qualitative changes in the global scene even if the rationale can be questioned. Gone are the days of two super powers when one could act as a deterrent to the other at least in some ways without giving a walk-over to the other. With the collapse of the former communist giant Soviet Union, now it is basically a one-sided affair. True, in all matters it is not a cakewalk for the super power and not without challenge or opposition, but definitely its say mostly is adhered to and Iraq is the biggest instance although few shed tears for Saddam Hussain. It was fundamentally a question of ethics governing international law. The democrat challenger to president

Bush says he is not opposed to what America is broadly doing in Iraq but differed in approach since the UN and the country's most allies were not taken along with in the exercise of colossal ramifications.

The outcome of the polls automatically becomes the cynosure of all eyes on a global scale since for the next four years the elected person will call the shots not only in his nation's affairs but will be in a position to do so to a great extent internationally. Foreign policy does play a role along with the domestic issues in the American presidential elections but this time the foreign policies occupied a greater place in the electioneering evidently for the Iraq crisis, to some extent Afghan tangle and some other issues of lesser importance. But it is the Iraq situation that continues to remain the

main headache of the United States, long time after the toppling of the Saddam regime and even after his arrest. A latest tape of fugitive Osama Bin Laden brings back the nightmarish memory of 9/11 and has also added a last-minute new dimension in the American election scene. This tape is creating some ripples on the eve of the polling and it remains to be seen who -- the incumbent president or the challenger -- is benefited by this latest developments as both have condemned Laden and vowed to crush "terrorists" at any cost although none missed the opportunity to hurl some mild accusations at the other centering the Laden issue.

Judging by the mood of the people in different countries, it appears that John Kerry enjoys clear edge over Bush in popularity and most Asian nations favour him even though governments of some of these countries sided with Bush administration on the Iraq issue like Japan and Australia, where people would like a change at the White House. If Australian prime minister John Howard has won a fresh term, it is mainly for his successful economic policies highlighted by the economic reforms.

The most people in South Korea, a staunch ally of the US is also reported to have liking for the Democrat nominee. Most Muslim countries are clearly against the Bush administration. South Asian countries seem by and large neutral even though Challenger Kerry appears likeable among the people. However, this may differ from country to country. In Pakistan, people appear to favour Kerry while Bush is known to be close with the government, whose close rapport with the present American government on the issue of "terror" is well known.

Going by reports, the Asian voters in the US favour Kerry but they are not the deciding factor as their number is not big as voters. One analyst said Kerry would have been an easy victor if those live abroad were the voters. But it is the Americans who would vote in the elections. This situation notwithstanding, the American presidential election is supposed to be a "close call". None hopes that outcome remains shrouded in uncertainty for many days as it unfortunately and incidentally did last time.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.