

Outlaws 'out of law'?

Rein them in

WE are at a loss to understand how a self-styled leader of an outlawed organisation having been on bail in three cases including sedition could go about his business under the nose of the law with cheerful abandon. The leader of the so called Al-Hiqma, banned in 2003, whose avowed policy, so far as is known, is militant in content and disposition, had attempted to organise a press conference with an inexplicable bravado. He, along with some associates, was arrested, only after and not before, they had the temerity to barge into a police station demanding explanation as to why they were being prevented from holding the press conference.

One is not sure what to make of outlawed leader's statement to the police after his arrest. Be that as it may, we must take his utterances as the worst case scenario of a fanatical flourish taken to some worrisome length. The Al-Hiqma leader claims a following of more than a hundred thousand, which if true, could only signify a lack of vigil on his self-proclaimed evolution. His claims of having a well knit intelligence setup which can take on the government, as well as commando elements has a sinister ring about them, which we can ill afford to overlook.

It seems that he has thrown a challenge to the government to test how far it is willing to go against the Al-Hiqma. Given the way the group has gone about the business of holding the press conference, which was well publicised through the press, one would have thought that they should have been nabbed well before they had the chance to go public.

The hit list of sorts that he has drawn up exhibits his frame of mind and his attitude towards the media. We feel that there is an urgent need for the government to go into the veracity of his statements and determine the group's linkages, internal and external, if any. The fact that there are disgruntled elements with certain psychological dispositions to be indulged in and exploited by vested quarters should not be made a short shrift of.

Investment in power sector

Roadblocks should be removed

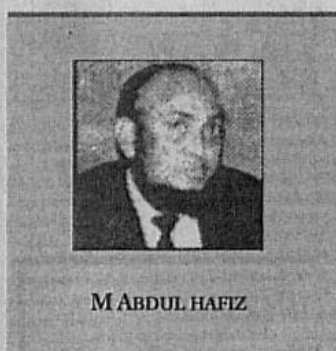
THAT donors may be shying away from investing in our power sector is definitely not good news, especially in view of the current energy scenario, both internal and external. According to some reports, funds earlier allocated for a power plant have already been diverted to the post-flood rehabilitation undertaking. And that too for problems which could largely have been avoided. Political interference, mismanagement and inordinate delays in getting a project on the roll -- are these something that we haven't heard before?

Let's take some of the facts given by the government into account. First of all, at present power that is being generated is already 100 mw short of requirement. If the demand as projected increases by 459 mw each year, there will be a need for additional 300 mw of power to meet the demand by 2007. And the government says that \$3.6 billion, a staggering amount, is required for generation, transmission and distribution of power by 2007. That is a huge task.

In the last three years since taking power, the government has set up a power plant with 450 mw generation capacity. Among the 15 other plants envisaged, only four have been awarded. No concrete information about the other plants is available. It's only natural for the multilateral agencies to feel 'frustrated'. Links to any political party should not be any criterion for award of work; competence and ability to implement and run a project must be the primary consideration.

It is often said that unless our power infrastructure is improved we shall have a low level of FDI inflow. On the other hand, heavy doses of investment are required to bolster the power infrastructure. Apparently, there is a dilemma here; but we believe if we did our part of the job there shouldn't be any insurmountable obstacle to revitalising our power sector.

Eid-thoughts of the year



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

LAST year on the occasion of Eid this column was dedicated to those 'for whom the bell tolled' in munga-hit northern districts where near-famine conditions were prevailing. The authority, apparently in tantrum, was of course dismissive of any crisis syndrome in those conditions and called them an 'usual' feature in North Bengal before the harvesting months. Apparently in tantrum it, in a way, suggested that the affected people ought to live up with it without making unnecessary fuss. However the hanger defied those arguments and the miseries of the poor and

dispossessed only multiplied. And the nimble-footed Eid arrived in their midst like a crude cruel joke. The column intended to share their anguish hoping, however, that the gesture wouldn't have to be repeated.

Belying those hopes the munga has again hit the area also this year. The authority also is routinely

universality of its festivity to prevail. In the meantime munga is not typical northern district phenomenon any more. It has bared its fangs also in the cities where with the soaring prices of the essentials, the city dwellers are gasping to make their both ends meet.

A 'sun-shine' theory was invented to explain some aspects

this socio-economic aberration -- not even the firebrand ideologues of socialism. At first opportunity most of them climbed up the social ladder leaving the weak in the lurch.

Our leaders might have tried to absolve their crisis of conscience by calling munga an usual feature of North Bengal at this time of the

prevails in big cities where a class of people has gone mad with their shopping spree in dazzling shopping malls displaying lehenga worth Taka two and half lakh while another class ploughs through the cities' rubbish bins. Couldn't there be a social engineering to strike a social balance in some way?

The people of this country

PERSPECTIVES

We will forget the pangs and pains of the routine and join the charade of celebration, notwithstanding continuing law and order problems, soaring prices, ever raging corruption, a restive society, political repression and an arrogance of power. There are already rulings that the law and order has improved, prices are stabilised and things are already within purchasing power of the people. Things are hunky-dory but for the opposition's perfidy. One can contradict the rulings only to buy problems.

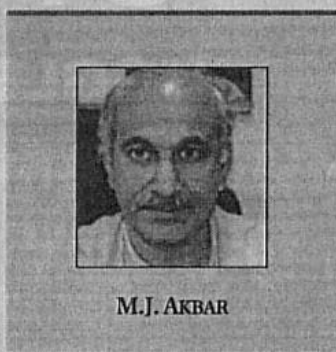
back with its 'usual feature' theory. And an Eid also is approaching fast, as if, to add insult to injury. The gala Ifitars witnessed in city hotels and posh public places are indications of what the Eid extravaganza would be liked. But the backdrop against which the Eid would be around makes it difficult for the traditional spontaneity and

of this munga but it did not click. With plenty of sunshine available little succor was afforded to the poor. The crux of the matter is our terrible socio-economic distortion. This is a country of dirt poor in squalor and super rich afloat in a few islands of plenty. Here the streets have either flashy cars or destitutes. None ever addressed

year, but the nagging question persists. What did they do to change those features for umpteen years the munga-hit people have been suffering with? The Dhaka-dwellers seldom wanted to miss the finest quality rice of North Bengal without caring to improve the lot of its producers. What a dichotomy! The same dichotomy

always fought for social justice and equity if not for doctrinaire socialism. The idea had been to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. It is, however, an irony that the gap only widened. So much so that the disparity had seldom been so blatant and naked in the past. The country boasts of sound macro-economy but the country's

The White Revolution



M.J. AKBAR

THE relevant question about Michael Moore's Stupid White Men, who took their revenge upon liberal hectoring and New York Times bestseller lists by electing George Bush, is not whether they are white, or whether they are men, but whether they are stupid.

We know they are white. 77 per cent of the American electorate in 2004 was white, and 58 per cent of this group voted for Bush, with only 41 per cent going for Kerry. You can already see where the election was lost. Since this is a national statistic, the percentage of white men voting for Bush becomes significantly higher in the states where he won, some of them by lopsided margins. A parallel fact: 88 per cent of black voters supported Kerry, as against 11 per cent for Bush. Now cue in the most interesting observation about this election that I have seen. Place a map of pre-civil war America over the electoral results of 2004, and you discover that Bush won in every one of the slave states and the territories open to slavery, while all of Kerry's victories came from the free states. Bush is President because he picked up Iowa and Ohio from the free states.

We know that they are men, a three-letter word that defines, more or less, that species of the American male which, like Mao Zedong, believes that power grows from the barrel of the gun (and which he once used to eliminate Red Indians and terrorise slaves). He has a strong

code, partly moral, partly secular, that treats abortion as sin; sneers at gays and is shocked at gay marriage; equates morality with prayer in schools and church on Sundays; and prides himself as a tough, silent guy (on the weekend before the election a CNN poll reported that mustard lovers wanted Bush over Kerry by a margin of four points). A number of such men also believe that Jesus was white (possibly with blond hair) and spoke English, which reinforces their self-confidence. Statistics

masses of the plain people. "There is evidence that Bush never lost any votes by doing so. It takeschutzpah to make the jobless support tax cuts for the rich. Merciless disinformation, unwavering propaganda, and an unblinking determination never to be distracted by facts, helps. That is why 75 per cent of Bush supporters are convinced that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was an ally of Osama bin Laden or was directly involved in 9/11. On another level, during the campaign, a member of the Bush

violence as a political weapon collapsed after his assassination. Ideologies like the Black Panthers radicalised the community. Johnson's answer lay in wide-ranging economic liberalism that has not only lifted blacks but also eliminated the harsher levels of poverty among whites, particularly in the South and Midwest.

Four decades later the poor are not an electorally significant demographic, which is why Kerry was constantly appealing to the 'middle

Is a keen observer of life. The word "intellectual" suggests straight away

A man who's untrue to his wife.

And so to the second politician from that era who deserves a thank-you note from Bush. Spiro Agnew, like Johnson, is dead, although his critics will still tell you where to address a note to him. Agnew was crude and unknown when Nixon put him on his ticket in 1968. Agnew launched an unprecedented counter-offensive against liberals, with

economic life is in a mess. Where only the crimes thrive dispelling an ambience of festivity. Yet an Eid of sorts will be enacted even in this country.

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While the Eid will be showcased in the government functions, official receptions and prayers in Eidgah, we can not lag behind in celebrations, whatever may be the cost involved -- moral and material.

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BYLINE

Bush divided America and the world to win. He would be foolish not to recognise the price his country and the world have had to pay for his personal glory. It has been a victory of zealots, but zealotry is not sustainable policy, not at home and not abroad. If Bush and his friend Tony Blair believe that their war can be won in Iraq, then they need to recheck the meaning of victory. The scars of the world will disfigure America.

Cabinet, its commerce secretary, Don Evans, dismissed Kerry as unreliable, and possibly more, because "he looks French." There is clearly no sharper insult in redneck America.

Investing in the "stupid" vote does not make Bush himself necessarily stupid. It might, as the results have shown, be the smart thing to do. But in dismissing the majority of the 77 per cent of America that is white and votes, as 'stupid' we may be missing the point.

The circumstances that have re-elected Bush owe their origins to decisions made and attitudes shaped in a process that began four decades ago, in the presidential elections of 1964 and 1968. Bush should first thank a fellow-Texan, Lyndon Johnson. When he was elected in 1964, America was riven by another of its many revolutions, the challenge from the blacks for social, cultural, and economic equality. The inspiration came from Martin Luther King but non-

class." Such upward mobility is never only economic. With housing and social stability also comes a shift in values, or, if you like, "morality." While Kerry understood the economics of this change, Bush appealed to the more nuanced, more emotive, and ultimately more powerful values. Prosperity is so often a relative term. Those who face hardships in an economic slump might yet consider life to be better than what it used to be. In any case, their prime area of self-definition is an assertion of values, for this, they believe, is what makes them legitimate members of a higher rung on the ladder of upward mobility. It is perfectly reasonable for them to resent an assault on these values, particularly when it comes from a more prosperous elite that displays more concern for gays than for God. At least one liberal (coincidentally gay) understood this. Wrote W.H. Auden in 1941:

To the man-in-the-street, who, I'm sorry to say,

the "nattering nabobs" of the eastern media as his core target. Agnew drowned in his own sleaze; the poor little boy from the heartland was not averse to some old fashioned bribery. But his assault lived after him. Some 36 years later, despite the relapse of the Clinton era, the spirit of Spiro Agnew has become mainstream America.

In the 1960s America witnessed the Black Revolution. This is the White Revolution.

There is a new American civil war in progress, which is one reason why the divide is so bitter, why passions are so high, and why the queues at the voting booths were so long. The two Americas have separate media, separate geography, different icons, divergent values, conflicting convictions and a single White House. If the New York Times is the voice of liberal, intellectual, and world-friendly America, then Fox News and the God channel are the trumpet and saxophone of the self-centric, hamburger-driven,

Therefore? Four more years of war? I am not so certain. The dynamic has changed in one crucial respect. Osama may have been Bush's most effective vote-getter, but Bush no longer needs any votes. His last election is over. A second term provides the ultimate freedom for an American President -- freedom from re-election. Bush divided America and the world to win. He would be foolish not to recognise the price his country and the world have had to pay for his personal glory. It has been a victory of zealots, but zealotry is not sustainable policy, not at home and not abroad. If Bush and his friend Tony Blair believe that their war can be won in Iraq, then they need to recheck the meaning of victory. The scars of the world will disfigure America.

Bush won because middle America rose against the sneers of the elite. If America continues to sneer at the world, Bush will lose. The election is over. The conflict is not.

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Quest for good governance

MD GIASHUDDIN AHMED

STRIVING for democracy by increasing number of countries during the last three decades has resulted in impressive progress in the attainment of the system of governance, rule of law and human rights. But it is also conspicuous that in many cases these noble attempts are threatened by crime and corruption, weak public administration, terrorism and lack of accountability. But good governance is today considered the *sine qua non* for sustainable development and social justice.

It is in this backdrop that today's governments, politicians, development practitioners and international agencies are now frequently using the term "good governance". At the same time, they also regard bad governance as major hindrance in the path of democratic rule and social justice. Major donors and international development agencies are imposing good governance as precondition for economic cooperation and other assistance. According to Mr. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, United Nations "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development".

Characteristics of good governance are attributed as participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and following rule of law. A good government assures that corruption is minimised, views of the minorities are taken into account, and voices of the unheard

in the society are heard in decision-making.

Participation means participation by both men and women may be directly or through institutions or appropriate representatives. It means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and organised civil society on the other hand. The grievances of the society are ventilated through these actors that guide the government in policy formulation and its implementation.

Rule of law is the corner stone of good governance. Without proper and neutral application of law, nothing could be achieved either for the people or for institutional democracy. Rule of law entails that none is above law and law is equally applicable to all the citizens.

Transparency denotes that enforcement of decisions is according to rules and regulations, that information is freely available and information is easily accessible by stakeholders, enough information is provided and in understandable forms and formula. It also means that proper facilitation should be there so that people understand clearly as to why government is doing a particular thing and under what law and justification.

Responsiveness denotes that process and institutions serve all stakeholders, and institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. The key requirement for installing responsive governance is political will of the government and institutions.

Consensus oriented means mediation of different interests to

reach a broad consensus and that for long-term perspective for sustainable human development. A society consists of so many viewpoints and different kinds of people. Good governance requires that government should properly attend to different interests in society so that reaching a broad consensus is possible.

Equity and inclusiveness means equity before law and equal opportunity for improvement and well-

society organisations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Accountability depends on transparency and rule of law. Good governance encompasses the institutional strengthening of three organs of government viz. Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. As for attributes, the legislature should be an organ for enactment of law where parliamentary committees and public accounts committee

A modern state is extensively governed by rules and regulations, by complex guidelines and instructions, by a web of regulations, restrictive, prohibitive and penal procedures. As a fish starts getting rotten from the head, good governance starts sliding from the hands of the people when the top people in parliament, executive and judiciary put rules and regulations aside and start ruling by the rule of the thumb.

being. The vulnerable groups of the society are to feel that they are included in the mainstream of society and have opportunities to improve and maintain their well-being. Effectiveness and efficiency means best use of resources, efficient and prompt service delivery, sustainable use of natural resources, protection of environment with strategic vision. That the institutions work actually to meet the needs of the society by best use of resources. Accountability is the key requirement of good governance. It means the institutional arrangement and practice by which the officials are to account for their actions. The effectiveness of accountability is one of the important yard stick for measuring the nature of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil

work properly. This legislature should be formed through fair and transparent election to whom the government should be accountable. The executive should be an organ for fair execution of laws that carry out programmes as per passed budget, ensures protection of life and property for all and carries out proper monitoring of programmes. The government is to ensure code of conduct for public servants, independence of public servants, protection of public servants, devolution of power and independent public service commission. An independent judiciary with trained personnel will ensure proper application of law and quick dispensation of justice. Such judiciary should be installed through appointment of impartial judges and staff along with provision of suitable emoluments for them.

tional interference, killings of the father of the nation and the great national heroes of independence. The failure of bringing the culprits to book has further worsened the situation.

Reports of donor agencies and international watchdogs bear the testimony of failure and frustration. Failure in establishing rule of law, constant violation of human rights, complete lack of transparency and accountability, delay in separation of judiciary, rampant corruption by state organs and lack of consensus building has further worsened the situation. Information is almost not accessible to the citizens. In many cases, the cost of information is too high to afford for which citizens always remain in uncertainty.

In Bangladesh systemic corruption has almost replaced the rule of law. The citizens at large are

association and speech are guaranteed, organised civil society is encouraged and patronised. The ethnic minorities and voices of the unheard should also be taken into active consideration during policy formulation and thereafter. It is the sacred duty of the government to ensure that the minorities participate in the government and elsewhere without any fear of repression.

In real perspective, Bangladesh is far from what is called the minimum standard of good governance. Corruption in every sector, inefficiency of bureaucracy, politicisation of administrative machinery, rampant violation of human rights and non-observance of the rule of law have created an environment of frustration for all. There is no scope of getting legitimate service by the poor people. Corruption has pol-

luted almost all the institutions meant for service delivery. Persons in such institutions behave like masters. Government must be responsive to the needs of the poor people and the minorities.

It is to be reckoned that good governance is a culture, which should be attained, strengthened and nourished by the key players of state in a way that it is deep rooted through institutionalisation for future.

Where to start?

Governance is a cross-cutting issue that affects every sector of development and social life. Good governance through transparency, efficiency and accountability ensures right use of the scarce resources that leads to desired and positive change in social life. Bad governance with its inefficient service delivery, inadequate policy settings, corruption, and despotic attitude leads to deterioration in the overall life style of the citizens. For attaining the minimum standard of good governance, the government should first of all embrace four principles of accountability, transparency, participation and predictability with sincerity and commitment.

A diagnostic look at the conflict-ridden society reveals that lack of political rights, unequal distribution of economic resources, corruption by the top brass of the society, disrespect for human rights, lack of transparency and accountability, despotic attitude of the governing machinery, absence of independent judicial system and absence of rule of law are the root causes behind continuous social conflict and

frustration. State and social support through consensus is key to rebuild a society affected by violent conflict.

Not only to create an atmosphere for attaining the committed millennium goals by 2015 but also to facilitate the donor agencies to come forward, the government should strive hard for attaining minimum standard of good governance through establishing rule of law, public accountability, transparency, independent human rights commission, independent judiciary, institution of ombudsmen, accountability of service providing institutions etc. Political torture, brutality of law enforcing agencies, arbitrary detention, violence against women, attacks against minorities and persecution of freedom fighters will only worsen the situation.

In the language of the former Chief Justice Mustafa Kamal, good governance "is an extension of the principle of the rule of law. A society is well governed when there is a rule of law, not a rule of man or woman. A modern state is extensively governed by rules and regulations, by complex guidelines and instructions, by a web of regulations, restrictive, prohibitive and penal procedures. As a fish starts getting rotten from the head, good governance starts sliding from the hands of the people when the top people in parliament, executive and judiciary put rules and regulations aside and start ruling by the rule of the thumb".

MD Giashuddin Ahmed is a former Joint Secretary.