

The holiday standstill

Emergency services shouldn't be allowed to slacken

EID holidays invariably roll onto the weekend and the number of days when life comes to a standstill increases up to seven or eight. This culture of extending the official holidays seems to have taken root deeper into our collective psyche. And such a vacation is taken as an occasion when everything can be put to rest, including the needs of a patient or a house owner without water, electricity or gas.

How could there be a slack in hospital services, especially in the emergency ward, even when most people are celebrating a major festival? The same is true about complaints relating to utility services which go unheeded. The stop-gap arrangements for providing the services seem to exist only on paper. As if to emphasise the point, people in trouble can only hope to get some service or payment of a hefty amount in "bakshis" if, of course, they were lucky enough to find out the right men when most government service outfits looked like abandoned houses.

We seem to have forgotten that certain things must be in place at all times. The government should think in terms of introducing better and reliable standby arrangements to meet emergency situations during holidays.

The problem of no-work mentality during holidays may turn acute in important places like airports, railway stations and river terminals. People do approach these places during holidays and their lives become miserable if they don't get the needed services. This is an issue that cannot be trifled with any more than we already have.

We cannot think of living in isolation from the dynamics of the modern world even for a short spell. We have to keep things functional in important areas like most of the countries do even on major holidays, to be part and parcel of the real-time world. If we want to be part of the global work culture, we have to basically clean up the dross in our workethics.

Rice as US Secretary of State

Can she breathe fresh air into US foreign policy?

THERE can be little surprise that National Security Advisor (NSA) Condoleezza Rice has been named to succeed Colin Powell as secretary of state. The promotion from NSA to State is not an uncommon one and Dr. Rice has been an unwavering advocate for a president who values loyalty.

Colin Powell's decision to step down as US secretary of state at the end of a tumultuous four years elicited mixed reactions.

But Powell had long been the most popular and respected member of the Bush cabinet internationally. Many considered him a moderating influence on US foreign policy, and are sorry to see such an able and highly regarded man quit public office.

There can be no doubt that Dr. Rice is eminently qualified for the job in terms of her experience and acumen. Whether she will possess the diplomatic capacity for the job, or indeed, whether the second Bush administration will place much emphasis on diplomacy, remains to be seen.

Critics will point out that she did not do a good job coordinating between the departments of State and Defence as NSA, and that her public statements on Iraq and WMD demonstrated a lack of candour. Cynics will say that Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld will continue to dominate US foreign policy-making regardless of who is secretary of state.

Either way, hers is a historical appointment. That she is the first female African-American secretary of state and that her tenure follows that of the first African-American and the first female secretaries of state is surely a good sign for the US.

In addition to her academic and intellectual credentials, Dr. Rice is a first-class pianist and one-time competition-level ice-skater who is said to be a gracious and decent person. Such an accomplished person with a strong mooring in cultural diversity should be a good communicator in international affairs.

The second Bush term is a historic opportunity for the US to recover from the mis-steps of the first, and we sincerely hope that Dr. Rice will succeed in her momentous task of bringing the US and the rest of the world closer together in the next four years.

After Arafat -- election or chaos?



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

pened to be Arafat's political Advisor remained in Tunis and did not return to Gaza.

I had the great opportunity to meet Arafat and later Farouk Qadoumi in Bucharest while I had been an Ambassador there during 1983-86. I do not remember the details of the meeting but still fresh in mind is Arafat's ever-smiling face. He was a man of unending courage as he continued to struggle against all enemies -- mainly Israel and also several adversaries within the Arab

care for about two weeks. After his death President Chirac personally came down to the hospital to pay his last respects to this great leader of the Palestinian people. Then France made full arrangement for sending the dead body of Arafat to Cairo for state funeral. France also sent its Prime Minister and other high officials to accompany the dead body. President Chirac said, "With him disappeared a man of courage and conviction who for 40 years incarnated the Palestinian fight for

independent, democratic Palestine that is at peace with its neighbours."

President Bush, however, had a joint press conference with Prime Minister Blair who visited him only two days after the death of Arafat. He walked joyfully and boastfully through the corridors of the White House with British PM Blair when US marines were busy in making Falluja -- a defiant city of Iraq -- a "Ground Zero". Even the International Aid Agencies termed Falluja operation with not only excessive

what Ariel Sharon said -- no Palestinian state in another 25 years (CNN's recent report by Walter Rogers).

It has just been reported that Sharon will not allow two million Palestinians of East Jerusalem to take part in January election to elect the President of the Palestinian Authority. One must point out that as long as Ariel Sharon is in charge of Israel, there can be no peace; it's just not possible. He was never a man of peace. The change of govern-

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

There are arguments that Arafat did not groom any successor. If one wants democracy to prevail, there could be no question of grooming of a successor. A successor is groomed under dictatorship. In any case, there are several leaders like Mahmud Abbas, Ahmad Qurei, Farouq Kaddoumi, Saeb Erekat, Nabil Sath, Hannan Ashrawi and many others to lead the nation. Indeed, there was an orderly transfer of power to the Speaker who would remain Interim President for 60 days and the election date has been set on January 09, '05.

world. He continued his fight and from a guerrilla leader he became the top leader of his people, then to a statesman, and to a leader of world stature when he received the Nobel Peace Prize which he shared with Former Prime Minister of Israel Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. He was the undisputed leader of the Palestinian people and seen as the father of a nation. He is bracketed with the leaders like Ho Chi Minh, Nelson Mandela etc, as he had to go through similar struggle to raise his people who are seen basically as refugees to the level of a nation to be recognised by the international community. Finally he became the President of the Palestinian Authority and continued to work to establish the State of Palestine which he could not live to see it finally established.

Arafat's death was mourned by the world leaders through very positive statements recognising his lifelong struggle for an independent state for the people of Palestine. The role of France was really unique as French President Jacques Chirac sent an aircraft to take Arafat to Paris where he was under special medical

recognition of their national rights." France should have a special place in the hearts of the Palestinian people.

One may also see the positive reactions of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. Mr. Blair said Arafat was the "huge icon of the Palestinian people" and we should do whatever is possible in association with the US to help the parties to reach a fair and durable settlement. He also earlier spoke of a viable Palestinian state. Indeed he put it as the "highest priority" for the international community.

The reaction of President Bush is less said the better. Not only that he never talked to Arafat nor did he ask him to visit Washington for talks during the four years of his first term. Even before Arafat's death (just on rumor) President Bush said - "May God bless his soul but after his death he did not even mention his name let alone speak something worth mentioning. President Bush, however, in general terms said, "For the Palestinian people, we hope that future will bring peace and fulfillment of their aspirations for an

but superpower force as a "disaster". In the joint press conference President Bush repeatedly spoke of the need for democracy and freedom among Palestinian people and electing a democratic leader for the purpose of establishing peace and democracy. But he never mentioned anything about the settlements that are needed to be removed from the occupied territories for the purpose of peace.

On a question from a reporter President Bush said -- when a person is elected by the people he is not a dictator, he is an elected leader. President Bush is right but why was Saddam then called a dictator? He used to be regularly elected and used to receive 99 per cent votes. It, however, depends on the type of election that elects a leader. President Bush did not take it that far as that was his main weakness. He was not elected by popular vote in 2000. Though President Bush said earlier that Palestinian state would be established by 2005, he is now saying that he would hope to see a Palestinian state during his present term i.e. during the next 4 years. Anyway, it's still not too bad. It is better than

ment in Israel is a must for peace in the region.

Arafat has all along been blamed by Israeli and US administration that he missed the great opportunity when he failed to sign the peace agreement which was brokered by former President Clinton where Ehud Barak, the then PM of Israel offered 97 per cent of the occupied territories. It was true that about 97 per cent of the only 22 per cent of the original Palestinian territory (78 per cent already occupied by Israel) was offered, but that also did not give the Palestinians a contiguous state and such a truncated area could not be called a state let alone a "viable state". There was also no decision on East Jerusalem even through adjustments of the area occupied by the settlements near East Jerusalem nor was there any decision on the Palestinians' right of the return to their ancestral home which is now in Israel (there could at least be a provision for an appropriate compensation for the displaced Palestinians). So it is not correct to say that it was a great opportunity and it was the best deal for the Palestinians that Arafat failed to sign.

There are arguments that Arafat did not groom any successor. If one wants democracy to prevail, there could be no question of grooming of a successor. A successor is groomed under dictatorship. In any case, there are several leaders like Mahmud Abbas, Ahmad Qurei, Farouq Kaddoumi, Saeb Erekat, Nabil Sath, Hannan Ashrawi and many others to lead the nation. Indeed, there was an orderly transfer of power to the Speaker who would remain Interim President for 60 days and the election date has been set on January 09, '05. The work has apparently been undertaken for a united front with Hamas and Jihad so that serious political problems could be avoided. Hamas and other fighting forces should be brought into the main political process to curb further armed clashes with Israel. Israel must encourage such negotiations with those fighting groups.

In order to hold a fair and effective election, Israel must create the right environment. The international community and particularly the US must prevail on Sharon to re-deploy Israeli army, remove the road blockades, allow the Palestinian leaders and their candidates to move freely to do election campaigning if there are more than one candidate. Israel must also allow the Palestinians of East Jerusalem to participate in the election to elect their own leaders. If Sharon thinks that Palestinians of East Jerusalem are Israeli citizens, then that would mean the end of the Peace Process as the Palestinians will never give up their demand on East Jerusalem. If Israel and the US are interested in peace, then there should be negotiations on how the latest settlements near or adjacent to East Jerusalem could be rearranged while fixing the final border under the Road Map. East Jerusalem is an internationally recognised occupied territory and unlawful annexation by Israel does not make it a part of Israel.

Muslehuddin Ahmad, a former Secretary and Ambassador, is presently the Vice Chancellor of Presidency University.

Condoleezza Rice: America's face to the world

PRESIDENT Bush on Tuesday nominated Condoleezza Rice, his confidante and national security adviser, as secretary of state.

She will succeed Colin Powell, who announced his resignation on Monday. "During the last four years I have relied on her counsel, benefited from her great experience and appreciated her sound and steady judgment," Bush said in a ceremony in the White House Roosevelt Room. Bush also said that he was honoured that she agreed to take the post.

"The secretary of state is America's face to the world, and in Dr. Rice the world will see the strength, the grace and the decency of our country," he said. Bush said that Rice's deputy, Steve Hadley, would succeed her as national security adviser. Rice said it had been a privilege to work for Bush during his first term. "I look forward, with the consent of the Senate, to pursuing your hopeful and ambitious agenda as secretary of state," she said. She also praised Powell.

"It is humbling to imagine succeeding my dear friend and mentor Colin Powell. He is one of the finest public servants our nation has ever produced," she said. "Colin Powell has been a great and inspirational secretary of state. It was my honour to serve alongside him, and he will be missed."

"Now that the election is over," Powell's letter to the president reads,

"the time has come for me to step down as secretary of state and return to private life. I, therefore, resign as the 65th secretary of state, effective at your pleasure."

If confirmed, Rice, who turned 50 on Sunday, would be the first black woman, and only the second woman ever, chosen as the nation's top diplomat.

At Stanford, she was a member of the Center for International Security and Arms Control, a Senior Fellow of the Institute for International Studies, and a Fellow (by courtesy)

and the final days of the Soviet Union, she served in the Bush Sr. administration as Director, and then Senior Director, of Soviet and East European Affairs, in the National Security Council, and Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. In 1986, while an international affairs fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations,

her mother, a music teacher, taught her the piano and she initially studied music with the ambition of becoming a classical pianist. Her father, a pastor and school principal, influenced her to become a keen sportswoman.

She was eight years old when the Ku Klux Klan carried out one of its most infamous bombings, of an

Stanford University's Center for International Security and Arms Control specialising in Soviet affairs.

A fluent Russian speaker and expert in arms control, she served as Soviet affairs adviser to the elder President George Bush, and coached him before nuclear summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Dr Rice returned to Stanford in 1991, and in 1993 became the youngest, the first female and first non-white provost at the elite California university.

The change at the head of US diplomacy comes as Washington makes a new push for Middle East peace following last week's death of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Powell, who is expected to stay on the job until mid-January, will make a trip to the region this month to possibly meet Palestinian leaders. Rice met Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei in Berlin in May in what was the highest-level US contact with Qurei at the time.

of the Hoover Institution. Her books include Germany Unified and Europe Transformed (1995) with Philip Zelikow, The Gorbachev Era (1986) with Alexander Dallin, and Uncertain Allegiance: The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army (1984). She has also written numerous articles on Soviet and East European foreign and defense policy, and has addressed audiences in settings ranging from the U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Moscow to the Commonwealth Club to the 1992 and 2000 Republican National Conventions.

From 1989 through March 1991, the period of German reunification she served as Special Assistant to the Director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In 1997, she served on the Federal Advisory Committee on Gender-Integrated Training in the Military.

Hadley is a former member of the Nixon and Bush Senior administrations, and was part of the foreign policy team with Rice and Richard Perle in the lead-up to George W. Bush's first election.

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Alabama church. One of four 10-year-old girls killed had been a friend of Dr Rice since infants school.

Her parents taught her that education was the only way to escape segregation. She has said that to get ahead she had to be "twice as good" as white children.

As a result she followed a glittering academic career. She went to the University of Denver at the age of 15 and graduated at 19 with a degree in political science. She then gained a doctorate from the University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies.

At 26, Rice was already a fellow at

AKM Mazharul Islam writes from the Department of Anthropology, Minnesota State University, USA.

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.

Cost of regulation rising!

The normal regulatory practices were neglected in the past by the regimes in Dhaka, due to political nepotism; hence the cost of regulation is rising disproportionately (additional fine for negligence). The government is buying dozens of costly vehicles for the police and RAB to control terrorism, lawlessness and other malpractices (news report). The identities of these lawbreakers are well known and they are very much citizens of Bangladesh; and, it appears, they are above the law! But they are hiding under the umbrella of the laws of the country, and are prominent members of the developing society!

What should have daily routine operation has now turned into ad hoc and emergency assignments to please the duffervoters.

Alif

Dhaka

means the end of politics! Of course the politicians would not agree (they never did). Hence we poor and neglected citizens have to serve the powerful and devious politicians term after term.

What happened to the citizens' right (CR) to good governance? These FIR and CR concepts are bugs to some lords, landlords and overlords. The kachha bazaars (kitchen markets) are not for them, shopping must be air-conditioned, as well as the cars.

Forget politics, and do some low-level arithmetic on economic disparities seen so starkly on the streets, shops and homes. The ruling politicians need indulge in nasty politics if they can do something to these economic indicators.

AZ, Dhaka

Transparency of CBAs

The composition, performance and credibility of the large number of collecting bargaining agents (CBAs), such as labour and other types of

unions and associations in the private and other sectors) need to be reviewed at high power national level, to maintain public transparency in these fast changing times of demands and threatening movements, when corrupt practices have become institutionalized.

A report in the DS of Nov 7 revealed how the hawkers' bodies are being indirectly controlled by dubious personalities and toll collectors. The recent transport strike by the association might also be associated with charging black market rates for tickets for Eid trips.

The CBAs present one side of the coin, imitated from our political culture; and get away through political nepotism. For the latter, the MPs are not entirely innocent. The political parties should not patronise the collective bodies as vote factories.

The weaknesses of the CBAs have to be pointed out, and the existing regulations amended to fit the times and immoral practices. Such exercises are easier to carry out if the parliament works in a normal routine way. Either democracy does not

work here, or the field workers of

democracy (politicians) are evading public responsibilities. On paper, we have the requisite number of committees and meetings and recommendations, but the situation is not improving. We are seeking Utopia, but cannot define it, nor plan a route map.

We have yet to become a disciplined society, and move away from agitational movements in day to day regulatory work. The government should be allowed to work, but this work must be transparent. How to remove this vicious circle?

For more than 30 years since independence, we have been agitating on so many issues and non-issues. When do we get down to root level? Why our major issues take so much time to resolve, when no foreigners are involved?

AZ, Dhaka