

Economic growth prospects assessed

BB report focuses on tasks ahead

THE Bangladesh Bank's Annual Report 2003-04, based on economic trends and indicators, has predicted that the possible contraction effects of the devastating floods and the soaring oil prices on GDP growth will be limited by virtue of a robust growth in export. The export earning grew by as much as 26 percent in the first two months of the current fiscal over the level registered during the corresponding period of the previous year. The export performance in the first quarter of fiscal 2004 together with the indications for the near future received from the private sector exporters make for a buoyant conclusion that overall export in FY 2005 may grow at double digit rate, markedly higher than had been originally envisaged.

At the same time, however, the central bank feels that in the perspective of the post-2004 quota-free global trade regime, our garments export sector is likely to face severe competition in the international market. This might have a negative impact on balance of payment, productivity and employment.

The rate of inflation is projected at 6.5 percent for this fiscal as compared with 5.83 percent in fiscal 2004 and 4.38 percent in fiscal 2003. The central bank estimates that the macro-economic impact of the recent oil price hike on balance of payments, inflation and growth, if sustained, 'will be significant but manageable'. The partial adjustment of fuel prices and absorbing the rest through the budget to cushion off the likely impact on consumer prices inevitably bring up the question of government borrowing and deficit financing. The countervailing arguments are that a 30 percent average increase in oil price will cost additional \$300 million which is 'significant but sustainable' and that the conversion from oil to gas in transport and power sectors will act as a mitigating factor.

The growth in the manufacturing sector at 7.7 percent compared with 7.3 percent of the previous year is a heartening thing to note, but we need to be wary of the fact that the wage rate decelerated. It stood at 7.6 percent in FY '04 compared with 15.4 percent increase in the previous year.

In all, we have a plenty of economic challenges on our hands.

Health crisis at DU halls

No sign of abatement yet

THE situation at the Dhaka University residential halls is slowly but definitely turning serious. On last count as many as 400 students were reported to have been infected by jaundice since last October. Though the disease was restricted to one or two halls in the past, now it has spread to almost five halls. And who else to be blamed for the crisis than the university or hall authorities for not taking precautions after detection of the disease among a group of students a month ago.

Since it's a contagious disease according to the doctors, it was only natural for us to expect that the authorities would have been activated to keep a check on the reasons for the spread. Had they been alert, the crisis that is looming large now could have been averted. Why did they wait till last Saturday to collect sample of drinking water from the halls for testing -- is a big question? Calling it an unpardonable delay wouldn't be an overstatement, simply because timely intervention by the authorities could have saved a lot of students from getting infected. According to reports, maintenance of hygiene standards in the kitchens left a lot to be desired. The authorities claim to have taken adequate measures in this respect, but visits to some of the spots revealed otherwise.

The students, not infected as yet, naturally have been spending their days in fear and uncertainty. They would be well-advised to be careful while drinking water or eating food from anywhere.

The university authorities might have constraints, financial or otherwise, but unless they realise the gravity of the rapidly deteriorating situation, their limitations would not carry any weight. We hope the authorities will redouble their efforts and take immediate steps to minimise the worry of the students. On a longer-term basis, they must strive to radically improve the amenities to ensure that such a situation never arose again.

FARIDA MAJID

I watched the Theo van Gogh film on the internet, and, like many discerning viewers, found it troubling. Formally and visually it is nicely done, as one would expect in a work from the descendant and bearer of the one of the greatest names in European art. Even the flashing of the Qur'anic verses on the flesh was filmed artistically, though the very idea, as reported in the press, offended many Muslims.

For me, the objectionable element was the content in its abstract obtuseness. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the writer and co-producer of the film, could have been more up-front and situated the whole script honestly in the context of her own background of contemporary Somali society. We would then have felt enlightened and informed. What we felt instead, is a narrator's voice intoning the paraphrases of the Qur'anic verses (most often quoted by the misogynist fundamentalists) in a manner that formulated a message that all

Muslim women purportedly believe, conform, and live their lives in that particular social arrangement, in that particular version of the literal sense of the Qur'an, and in that particular state of suffocation of their humanity. "This is Islam, folks, what can you say!" The film's deliberate decontextualisation from any real world situation may have been an attempt to flaunt it as an artistic expression, but I could not buy it as such.

In the wide, wide Muslim world of diverse cultures and traditions, I know too well that any Muslim girl's life could possibly be as bad, not so bad, worse, far worse, or not resembling anything at all of the sort depicted in the film. Stereotyping is a form of propagandising device that must not be mistaken as a proffered idea intended to initiate dialogue or for progress or betterment of humanity. Rather, its intention is regressive, using intentional face-to-face insults under cover of "free speech" in assaultive racist expressions.

Disappointment galore



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THERE was apparently a shock and indignation over Bush victory early this month. It was so spontaneous that there was no attempt even to conceal the sentiment. The news came as if with a funeral note plunging millions in a sea of grief. The most part of the world and majority of mankind are deep distressed even at the prospect of putting up for another four years with Bush presidency which they abhorred in the past and earnestly longed for getting rid of. Embittered with its harsh moralistic conservatism accompanied by unilateralist swagger the experience of America under administration has already been anything but unsavoury across the world. Any prolongation of that experience has been the last thing the world wanted.

Still worse is the long shadow it cast beyond Bush presidency. The Republicans have been successful in cultivating an evangelist Christian fundamentalism as their electoral base in the vast swathe of so-called Bible belt in the middle America and deep south which will be hard to break or penetrate anytime soon. What is equally significant is a

Republican revolution in which they expanded their presence in 100-seat Senate from 51 to 55 seats beating Democrats in almost every close contest and toppling their Senate leader. They increased their majority in the House of Representatives too. Under Bush the Republicans have won clear control of both legislative and executive branch of the government. Also another front of opportunity is opening up for President Bush. With up to four Supreme Court judges likely to be replaced in four years the man in the

famously talked of two Americas: "one is generously and humane, the other narrowly egoistical; one is self critical, the other self-righteous; one is sensible, the other is romantic; one is good humoured, the other solemn; one is inspiring, the other pontificating; one is judicious and another arrogant in the use of its great power."

Which of these two Americas would prevail as a result of Bush's reelection is the question the mankind is seized with. Because in a world where everything from who

of his Senatorial gravitas was playing on Bush's ground rather than going whole hog to exploit Iraq mess-up. He couldn't do so because he himself unequivocally supported the war in the Senate. So in the name of anti-war campaign whatever he waffled turned into a paler version of Bush's war policy. If both the candidates were speaking more or less the same language on the same theme either on Iraq or global terror threat the voters were more inclined to buy the genuine thing which was unmistakably found in Bush while

the US electoral system and a split decision of Supreme Court. It seemed to be an accidental presidency -- one that would stand out in history book as a freak event. Now he has come back with flying colour becoming rare member of the surprisingly small, select club of presidents who have the credit of winning full two terms and that too convincingly. With that handsome victory Bush was expected to exude magnanimity which is however not in his chemistry.

During the first term if he

despite the death of more than 1000 US soldiers and countless Iraqis, despite the hoax of the weapon of mass destruction, despite Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo the Bush administration won the approval of American people. If Bush had lost, the neo-conservative project would have been buried for ever. But as he has won the neo-cons will welcome that as a sweet vindication. And obviously more preemption, more deaths and destructions loom. That's where is the anxiety of the world at large.

Ms Danielle Pletk of the American Enterprise Institute, an impeccable neo-con ominously said: Iran would not go away. Force might be the only option. Nor would North Korea bend. We can't all pretend that the world would be a prettier place if only George Bush was not the president. Yet there were plenty of people around the world who instinctively thought that way hoping that the bad dream of past four years would in any case end on second November. Now they have to navigate around a geo-political landscape in which President is the dominant, fixed feature. Many Americans are afraid that the field day Bush will enjoy for next four years will create a nightmare worse than anything their country has seen.

The fear and despair evoked across the globe by the US election result are indeed shared by many millions of US citizens. For they know that this result will do nothing to placate their cry for health care, a living wage and decent public service. It will not reverse the leftwing tide in Latin America and it will do nothing to curb resistance in Iraq.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

Many Americans are afraid that the field day Bush will enjoy for next four years will create a nightmare worse than anything their country has seen. The fear and despair evoked across the globe by the US election result are indeed shared by many millions of US citizens. For they know that this result will do nothing to placate their cry for health care, a living wage and decent public service. It will not reverse the leftwing tide in Latin America and it will do nothing to curb resistance in Iraq.

White House will be in a unique position to replace them with the men of his choice and thus influence the direction of America's constitutional law. The Republican gains thus achieved would be impossible to reverse for many years and the neo-cons would continue to rule the roost.

The liberalism, if any left, will be in the meantime pushed to the backburner. Precisely, what is at stake is America's political soul. Equally under threat is the secular foundation of the United States which always is an open society. During the Vietnam war Senator William Fullbright, a great liberal,

holds the rein of the sole superpower to the world view held by him comes into play to shape the life and destiny of every human being in one form or the other, this is indeed the moot question. The world's concern of it is evident from the intensity of its interest in the election and the outcome thereof as well as in vast number of Americans wondering whether their great country would be able to reach out to the world in a spirit of partnership or continue with its sullen rejectionism.

However much unsavoury election result the world is confronted with was not entirely unexpected. John Kerry, the challenger -- with all

Kerry seemed more of imitation. John Kerry showed the same flip-flop with regards to his views of Israel -- a country that singularly benefited from Iraq war. Of course, Kerry was no mean supporter of Israel but the real hero of pro-Israel lobby was undoubtedly Bush who was the catalyst of all of Sharon's achievements vis-a-vis the Palestinians.

All these were in spite of ignominy through which the first Bush presidency came into being. It then looked like an aberration. Bush tenure of White House was born in 2000 to an electoral quirk, the fruit of Florida fiasco, the arcane algebra of

calculatedly and cold bloodedly wreaked havoc in the name of his war on terror there are prognoses that he will get more ruthless with his hapless victims rather than relenting on them. He gave an open licence of blood-thirsty Ariel Sharon to kill, destroy and grab. His marines indiscriminately killed women and children in Fallujah in the name of hunting down so-called terrorists. He has installed a puppet government in Afghanistan in the name of democracy and is about to do the same in Iraq soon.

He is not about to ditch the approach of last four years. Despite the mayhem and murder in Iraq,

Reforming the non-party caretaker government system

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

THE common nine-point charter of demands announced by the Awami League (AL), the main opposition party in parliament, left-leaning 11-party alliance, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), National Awami Party (NAP) and Jatiya Janata Party on 18 November, 2004, became the headline of most of the national dailies on the following day. It appeared from the newspaper reports that the demands included, *inter alia*, holding polls under a neutral caretaker government after reforms to the electoral system, ousting war criminals from the cabinet and the administration, curbing the price hike of essentials, implementing Chittagong Hill Tracts accord. But none of the nine demands called for reforming the non-party caretaker government system. The statement made by Mohammad Nasim, minister for home affairs in the immediate past AL government, at the AL central working committee (ALCWC) meeting on 23 November last confirmed this. According to newspaper reports, Mohammad Nasim said that the nine-point demand missed a key demand of the main opposition AL for reforming the caretaker government system. The AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil and other top AL leaders made it clear that the nine-point charter of demands had the approval of the AL chief Sheikh Hasina who was at the moment on a private visit to the United States.

Against the AL-led opposition alliance stand not to go for the reform in the non-party caretaker

government, Shah A M S Kibria, minister for finance in the last AL government, in an article published in *The Daily Star* of 23 November has come with a proposal for reforming the non-party caretaker government law. I quote from Mr. Kibria's proposal. He writes, "One proposal, (just as a suggestion), is to make all the retired judges of the appellate division, including the retired chief judges, eligible for selection as chief adviser. Clearly, this will create a

lar party's interests." Second, his presumption that since the immediate past Chief Justice KM Hasan who "is sure to be appointed chief adviser when the present government's term expires" served as "the secretary of the international committee of the BNP" during the regime of President Ziaur Rahman, he will follow "in the footsteps of Latifur Rahman...". So, according to Mr. Kibria, "it would tantamount to committing suicide for the Awami

Chief Justice. If no retired Chief Justice is available or willing to hold the office of Chief Adviser, the President shall appoint as Chief Adviser the person who among the retired Judges of the Appellate Division retired last. If such retired Judge is not available or is not willing to hold the office of Chief Adviser, the President shall appoint as Chief Adviser the person who among the retired Judges of the Appellate Division retired next before the last such

The appointment of the Chief Adviser by the President from among citizens in consultation with the major political parties is the last choice.

Mr. Kibria's proposal "to make all the retired judges of the appellate division, including the retired chief justices, eligible for selection as chief adviser" does not appear to significantly differ from the existing constitutional provision on the issue. If we closely look at the consti-

moment. When two major political parties cannot agree on a single point, then "to settle on one" as the Chief Adviser by a large number of political parties, big and small, is anybody's guess.

Since the AL-led opposition alliance's recently announced nine-point charter of demands did not include the demand for reforming the caretaker government system, it may be presumed that the proposal to reform the caretaker government law is the personal opinion of Mr. Kibria. However, if AL wants to revert to its earlier demand for reforming the caretaker government system, it should raise its specific proposal in parliament. But AL will have to think whether that will cost its recent agreement with the left-leaning 11-party alliance, JSD, NAP and Jatiya Janata Party. BNP-led alliance government must not obstruct the raising of such proposal in the House. If a better formula for appointment of the Chief Adviser and other Advisers of the caretaker government is available through discussion in the House, that will be an invaluable contribution to the nation. If a better formula acceptable to all or two-thirds of the total members of Parliament is found, then further amendment(s) to the Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Act, 1996 will be a matter of formality. The procedure for amendment of the Constitution is embedded in the Constitution itself (Article 142).

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the government.

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pool of senior persons out of which one may be chosen who happens to enjoy the confidence of both sides. Since the choice will be open to several individuals, it should be possible to settle on one who will be acceptable to both sides. Discussions on the acceptability of a person as chief adviser can be conducted by the president with the participation of senior leaders from both sides. Such a reform will save the appellate division and the office of the chief justice from manipulation by the ruling party." Mr. Kibria's proposal seems to have stemmed from his two perceived notions. One, his perception that Justice Latifur Rahman, the Chief Adviser of the last non-party caretaker government served "a particu-

League and other opposition parties to participate in an election when Justice Hasan will head the caretaker government." It is most likely that Mr. Kibria's proposal / suggestion will have mixed reactions.

Let us look at the constitutional provision regarding appointment of the Chief Adviser and the Advisers of the non-party caretaker government. The Constitution provides that the President shall appoint as the Chief Adviser the person who among the retired Chief Justices retired last. If such retired Chief Justice is not available or is not willing to hold the office of Chief Adviser, the President shall appoint as Chief Adviser the person who among the retired Chief Justices retired next before the last retired

retired Judge. If no retired Judge of the Appellate Division is available or willing to hold the office of Chief Adviser, the President shall, after consultation, as far as practical, with the major political parties, appoint the Chief adviser from among citizens who are qualified to be appointed as Advisers. If the above mechanism fails, the President shall assume the functions of the Chief Adviser. The President shall appoint the Advisers, not exceeding ten, on the advice of the Chief Adviser.

It appears from above that the choice for appointment of the Chief Adviser of the non-party caretaker government has been placed entirely on the retired Chief Justices and the retired Judges of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

tutional provision quoted above regarding appointment of the Chief Adviser, it appears that all the retired Chief Justices and the retired Judges of the Appellate Division have been made eligible for appointment as Chief Adviser step by step. What is a departure in Mr. Kibria's proposal is that he has proposed creation of a pool of the retired Chief Justices and the retired Judges of the Appellate Division to make it possible "to settle on one who will be acceptable to both sides." It seems that by "both sides" is meant the party/ alliance in power and the opposition parties in parliament and outside parliament. In the absence of any law requiring compulsory registration of political parties, it is difficult to say how many political parties we have at the

OPINION

Van Gogh's film on Muslim women

Theo van Gogh's film, even now with its addendum of crime and controversy, would do nothing to make the newly hijabed Muslim women's life any easier. It was not made with the goodness of the heart intended towards enabling more Muslim girls feel the sunlight bathing their faces and enjoy the wind rustling through their hair as they walk freely under the open sky. It is a spiteful depiction of a 'perception' of Islam's treatment of women, abstractly composing a composite, an aggregate made up of some un-lived guesswork of a life with an artificial enactment of scraps of evidences from scriptural text.



Theo van Gogh: Assassinated filmmaker

love the racist Islamophobia of the neo-con Imperialists. Look how they have succeeded in being equal

partners in the destruction of Fallujah! And the destruction of the rest of Iraq for that matter, which, despite being under a Stalinist type of modern-day dictator, used to be a secular modern Muslim country in the Arab world where women enjoyed, in education and health care areas, a reasonably acceptable gender-equal status.

The subversive effect of Van Gogh's film on the Islamists calls for a closer look. The film is not quite a 'critique' of current or past social condition in Muslim societies around the world, though that is how it is being touted in the media. On the contrary, it 'affirms' the woman's position as that which is unchanged, and impossibly unchangeable, in a dur, incomprehensible religion that is called Islam. It is, in another twisted way, the message of the Islamists, i.e., to define the Muslim woman's role in life is the prime duty of the Islamists, and it is their's alone. Due to his own blind Islamophobia, Van Gogh did not -- could not -- realise that he was somehow taking part in the

disseminating of this odious message and thereby sabotaging their mission, upstaging them in a way, and thereby incurring the rage that ended in the gruesome murder. Van Gogh could call the Muslims "goat-fuckers" and all the other slurs he could think of for all eternity, and chances were, that he would still be gloriously alive as alive as our Islam hating neo-cons of United States.

Only briefly, for those few moments, when the narrator spoke of the desire to feel the sun on her face and the breeze to rustle through her hair, did I think that there was any reaching out to the Truth expressed in the purpose of Van Gogh's film. Only for that brief moment the Muslim woman was not shown merely as a creature of 'male sexual fantasy'. The film's attempt to humanise the 'abstract' Muslim female was otherwise dimly feeble.

I suspect that the murderer of Van Gogh thought so too. The image of a Muslim woman, as depicted in the Van Gogh film, is EXACTLY how the Islamist would like to see women

subsist in an idealised Islamised society of their choice. Unbeknownst to Van Gogh, he let their secret out. And he thought he was simply criticising the "goat-fuckers", how they treat their women being a supporting detail, possibly a minor one compared to the more important issue of stopping the immigration of these 'dirty' Muslims into a pure Christian Holland!

I do like David Aronovitz's article (the *Guardian*, Nov. 16, 2004) that sees similarities between the Jews being branded as the "Christ-killer" and the current rush in Europe and America for Muslims being branded as the "killer" of all things that "WE LOVE & ENJOY" such as freedom and democracy. Tough claim after the election victory of the right wing Evangelicals in the United States who are anything but religious pluralists, and in whose hands the hard-earned women's rights are in serious jeopardy!

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