

Who the devil really was

FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

Already the preparations for Iraq's elections are stirring debate and discussion among its neighbours. Remember, these are the first genuine, national elections in the entire region. As 300 million Middle Easterners watch Iraqis going to the polls, they will surely ask a simple question: "Why not us?"

arrived in London the day after Hamid Karzai's inauguration as Afghanistan's newly elected president. Britain's most serious left-of-centre newspaper, The Guardian, reported on the event in detail, noting that after decades of war, coups and bloodshed, this was a historic day. Its op-ed page had a somewhat different interpretation. It carried a huge, lurid cartoon of Dick Cheney, surrounded by Bush, Rumsfeld, and Karzai, all looking drunk or mad or both, and singing: "Afghanistan! Afghanistan! From Shining Seal!"

Is this the European left's response to elections in Afghanistan? If so, it had better brace itself for even worse news: elections in Iraq. We have gotten used to bad news from Iraq -- and there will be more. But there is good news as well. Elections are likely to go ahead

as scheduled. In November, as the attack on Fallujah began, I argued that it would be a turning point, one way or another. It now appears that Fallujah altered the dynamic for the better. It's not simply that it was a military victory -- everyone expected that. Far more important, the victory did not seem to generate a high political cost (something I was worried about). The uproar that was expected across Iraq in response to the operation simply did not happen. The Shia and Kurds did not complain, and even the "Sunnis street" was much quieter than anticipated.

The best evidence for this comes from the audio tape released by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, one of the insurgent leaders, on November 24, in which he laments that the clerics, leaders and people of Iraq abandoned him: "You have let us down in the darkest circumstances and handed us over to the enemy... You have quit supporting the mujahedeen... Instead of implementing God's orders you chose safety and preferred your money and your sons."

Six months ago America was headed for disaster in Iraq, with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani threatening to call for active Shia opposition. At this point, Iraq policy was taken out of the Pentagon and run out of the White House, under

Iraq remains unstable and highly unsafe. But if al-Zarqawi is reading the public's mood right, the insurgency is losing popular support. It will try to disrupt the elections. The bigger problem remains Sunni participation. But assuming substantial Shia and Kurdish turnout, if 30 percent of the Sunnis vote -- and that is quite possible -- it's enough to give the new government some real national legitimacy. And that will make it easier to tackle the insurgency.

I have never believed that the chaos in Iraq during the last 18 months was inevitable or that Iraq is destined for insurgency and civil war. Many of the problems that afflict Iraq today are the result of bad American policies. As those policies have been reversed, things have gotten better.

The United States has paid a terrible price for this war -- in Iraq and in the world at large -- unconscionably high, given how many of these costs were avoidable. And I could be wrong about Iraq, in the sense that things could get much worse. Civil War, rampant anti-Americanism, and terrorism are all part of the possible future. But what I am not wrong about is that a more decent, pluralistic Iraq would make a huge difference in the Arab world. Already the preparations for Iraq's elections are stirring debate and discussion among its neighbours. Remember, these are the first genuine, national elections in the entire region. As 300 million Middle Easterners watch Iraqis going to the polls, they will surely ask a simple question: "Why not us?"

The current issue of Foreign Affairs has an exchange between two scholars, Tony Smith and Larry Diamond. Smith accuses Diamond, a longtime supporter of human rights, of making a "pact with the devil" by working "briefly" for the United States in postwar Iraq. Diamond, who had opposed the war, responds: "I do not regard the post-war endeavour as a pact with the devil. Let Smith and other critics visit Iraq and talk to Iraqis who are organising for democracy, development, and human rights. Let them talk to the families that lived under constant, humiliating, Baathist rule. Let them see some of the roughly 300 mass graves of opponents of the regime who were brutally slaughtered in the hundreds of thousands. Then they will find out who the devil really was." I can't say it better.

In the annual meeting of the American Studies Association held in Atlanta, there were panels that addressed the US hegemonic and imperialistic foreign policy spearheaded by Bush. The US government was also severely condemned for violating human rights in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prison. Even though President Bush has been reelected because of a neo-conservative revival in the American heartland, the academic community throughout the country remains largely liberal. Therefore, ideas conducive to the betterment of humanity continues to flow out of American academia. This, of course, is good for all of us around the globe who respect humanity and believe in human progress.

DS: Research and teaching of American Studies in Bangladesh is supported by the US government. Do you think it will be possible to have the proper perspective given the source of funding?

GSC: It's true that whatever is done with American Studies in Bangladesh is done with the help of funding procured from the US State Department. Yes, if a meaningful research, study, and teaching of American Studies is to continue in this discipline, we've to look for other sources of funding, because a continuous dependence on the American establishment is bound to affect the objectivity and neutrality of the research of American Studies in Bangladesh or in South Asia.

DS: Having studied in the US for six years, you are very familiar with it. The American media generally looks only for disaster and natural calamities when trying to portray Bangladesh. Why is it so?

GSC: The Americans love news relating to sensational disasters and catastrophes. Therefore, the media caters to popular demand while treating Bangladesh. If the country can show spectacular growth and development, I'm sure the media is going to give a positive image of this country. Already, the adjective moderate is being used a lot to describe Bangladesh.

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Interview with Prof. Golam Sarwar Chowdhury: American Studies and Bangladesh

'I am sure that the ascendancy of the neo-cons will not last'

Golam Sarwar Chowdhury was instrumental in the founding of the Bangladesh Association for American Studies in 1986 and has worked hard to popularise American Studies in Bangladesh ever since. Prof. Chowdhury is on leave from his position as Professor and Chair, Department of English at the University of Chittagong, and is currently working for the British Council in Dhaka. This past November, Daily Star columnist Ron Chepesiuk caught up with Prof. Chowdhury at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association in Atlanta, Georgia, where he delivered a paper on "American Studies in Bangladesh: A post 9/11 Evaluation." Here are excerpts from their interview:

RON CHEPESIUK

Daily Star (DS): Why is American Studies important for a poor country like Bangladesh, which needs to improve the standard of living of its people?

Golam Sarwar Chowdhury (GSC): American Studies could work as a conduit that could bring in ideas and thoughts from the US and the West that are absolutely essential for strengthening important institutions in Bangladesh. If the country can't continue to go to the democratic way, development of its economy will become extremely difficult. American Studies is an academic discipline that doesn't just teach about the US. It also helps in broadening the understanding of ideas related to a democratic and secular society.

DS: How can American Studies help now that the US has a conservative leadership that has shown it doesn't really care about its image in the world and anti-Americanism is rampant in the world?

GSC: American Studies is not about fundamentalism and conservatism, it is against the forces that impede progress and use religion to deny the basic rights to the citizens. American Studies is taught and learnt in the academy, which is preponderantly liberal. In the US universities and colleges the ratio of conservatives to liberals is about 1:10 in the direction of liberalism. The US federal government led by Bush is indeed very right wing but the American people have high hopes in the ideals of the founding fathers. I am sure that the ascendancy of the neo-cons will not last for long time.

DS: From an American Studies point of view, what would you say about the rise of religious fundamentalism in the US?

GSC: The US was a country founded by the early pilgrims who saw the land as a "city atop the hill." The newly discovered land promised unrestricted religious freedom for the puritans who crossed the Atlantic following religious persecution in England. From then onwards, religion remained a strong factor in American culture. Consider the sermons of Cotton Mather and his peers. They all spoke about an angry God and threatened hellfire to those who didn't abide by God's law. This strong religious spirit still remains internalised in American society.

The US's belligerent tendency to police the rest of the world is only a secular version of the same religious value that made the early pilgrims think of themselves as the chosen people destined to show light to an otherwise benighted world. American Studies, however, is entirely secular, and questions the hegemonic role of the US in terms of its relationship with the rest of the world.

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বিজিএমইএ নির্বাচন ২০০৫-২০০৬

জরুরী বিজোৱা

এতদ্বারা বিজিএমইএ'র সকল সম্মানিত সদস্যদেরকে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, নির্বাচনী তফসিল অনুযায়ী নির্ধারিত Voter Nomination, Specimen Signature, TIN, Photographs ইত্যাদি প্রয়োজনীয় কাগজপত্র জমা দেয়ার সময়সীমা আগস্ট ২৩ ডিসেম্বর ২০০৪ বিকাল ৫ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত বর্ধিত করা হলো।

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দরপত্র বিভিন্ন

১। কাজের নাম

: ক) অধিনবাজার (সাতার) ২৩০/১৩২ কেডি উপকেন্দ্র এলাকায় একটি ৮০০

বর্ষস্থূল ৪ ইউনিট আবাসিক ভবন নির্মাণ কাজ।

খ) নির্মাণীন অধিনবাজার (সাতার) ২৩০/১৩২ কেডি উপকেন্দ্রের পরিসীমার

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খ) উগ-মহাবাস্তুপক, এককঠ-২, বাড়ি-৬, রোড-২৩/এ, তলশিল-১, ঢাকা।

গ) উগ-মহাবাস্তুপক, এককঠ-২, বাড়ি-৬, রোড-২৩/এ, তলশিল-১, ঢাকা।

ঃ ক) টাকা ২,০০০/- (দুই হাজার) মাত্র

খ) টাকা ৫,০০০/- (পাঁচ হাজার) মাত্র (অক্ষেত্রেও) পাওয়ার প্রীতি কোম্পানী

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করিবে।

ঃ ক) ১০/১/২০০৫ইঠ অনিম চলাকালীন সময়।

৬। দরপত্র দলিল জমাদানের বেস তারিখ ও সময় :

: ১০/১/২০০৫ইঠ বেলা ১২:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।

৭। দরপত্র দলিল মোশার তারিখ ও সময় :

: ১০/১/২০০৫ইঠ বেলা ১২:৩০ ঘটিকা।

৮। জামানত (ফেরতযোগ্য)

: ক) ১০,০০০/- (দশ হাজার হাজার) মাত্র

খ) ২,০০,০০০/- (২ শত পাঁচাশ হাজার) মাত্র পাওয়ার প্রীতি কোম্পানী অব

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করিবে।

ঃ ক) ১৫০ দিন।

৯। কাজ সম্পত্তির সময়সীমা

: ক) ১৫০ দিন।

১০। ঠিকাদারের যোগাযোগ

: একই প্রকারের কাজে অভিজ্ঞ সম্পত্তি বিউরো, ঢেলা, গণপত্র ও পাউরো এর প্রধান

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উগ-মহাবাস্তুপক

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Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

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