

# Bush claims 'resounding success' in Iraq elections!



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

was forced on the population and some who were oppressed by Saddam joined the process despite the risk involved. The nation paid extremely heavy price to achieve Bush's "resounding success" in terms of bringing disgruntled groups of Iraqis to the polling stations.

Only pushing ballot papers into the ballot boxes under bullets and bombs without even knowing who they are voting for does not mean democracy. Then Saddam's elections also meant democracy; there they at least knew who they were

security, food, electricity, gas etc and life used to be normal, this time Iraq stands virtually devastated -- no food, no electricity, no gas etc. Saddam kept Shias, Sunnis, Kurds together to make one sovereign Iraq, but today Iraq stands ethnically divided -- may even fall apart any time, -- a "resounding success" indeed!

Occupation of some sort could have been established by America even without invasion. Huge amount of money -- billions of dollars -- has been spent for the inva-

expatriate government in Iraq as Alawi and many of the contestants are expatriates who returned after some 25-30 years of their stay abroad unless the local Shia leader Sistani's group captures a large number of votes which cannot be ruled out. It was an unusual election where the names of the contestants were divulged only in the night before election. So, electorates did not even know the names of the candidates let alone see them in any election campaign and learn about their plans and programmes for the country. There were no foreign election observers; only the media observed the election and gave their part of the story. Such an election would have no validity in any other country. But here the case is special and that is why the west and part of Arab world leadership saw it as a first step in the democratic process.

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## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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Iraqis gather along a pavement near wall decorated with various posters of Shiite Muslim Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in central Baghdad 03 February 2005. The likely electoral victory by a Shiite alliance, backed by Sistani in Iraq has raised the sensitive issue of religious interference in state affairs, despite attempts by the front-running ticket to quell secular fears.

voting for. Iraqis had been going through some form of election process for decades. Only difference was that they had only one choice -- who was a devout nationalist and a man of the soil. This time they had many choices but most of them are really foreigners (expatriates) to the Iraqis with no real allegiance to Iraq. Any serious problem, they would fly out to their own destinations abroad. Earlier the brutal dictator killed Iraqis who opposed him but never dishonored them. This time the Iraqis who opposed occupation forces were not only killed (present estimate is 100,000 Iraqis were killed by the occupation forces), they were hugely dishonored that created worldwide uproar.

In addition, because of the UN sanction for over a decade Iraq reportedly lost a generation (million children died). Earlier it was an Iraqi dictatorship, this time it's a remote control dictatorship and undoubtedly more brutal as, apart from slaughter of numerous Iraqis, the homes and cities (Fallujah, Somara etc) were reduced to rubble. Under Saddam, before UN sanction, Iraqis had practically no problem with

sion, and more would be spent in the days ahead to fix up the devastation inflicted by the occupation army.

But even half the amount would not have been needed to topple Saddam if Bush Administration had followed a different path with the help of Iraqi people. But WMD case had to be created for the purpose of invasion which was planned some months ago (ref Bob Woodward's "Plan of Action") apparently with the purpose of making Israel safe in the region for all time to come. (ref Sharon's eight visits within a couple of months to the White House before invasion and practically none after the invasion). CIA was made the scapegoat as it went for bad and selfish advice/intelligence of Alawi-Chalabi and company on WMD which never existed and in the process CIA lost its unique power because of the consequent reorganisation of the US Intelligence apparatus.

Undoubtedly, interim PM Alawi wanted to have the election as he knew that he will get full security cover from the occupation forces and he could have his and his groups' positions established. This election is likely to establish an

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

failure to investigate previous grenade and bomb attacks has created an anarchic situation. They expressed their observation in a joint statement issued on January 28.

It is learnt from the media report that terrorists, who carried out last year's grenade attacks on the Awami League rally at B.B. Avenue, Dhaka and on British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Chowdhury in Sylhet, used the same Arges brand grenade on the Awami League rally at Boidder Bazar in Habiganj. After inspecting the spot and examining the pieces of evidence, a bomb squad of Rapid Action Battalion identified the grenades. It reveals that an organized gang of terrorist has been mounting the attacks one after another, and at least half a dozen of country's intelligence agencies have miserably failed to nab a single perpetrator even with the help of Interpol and FBI experts! It is now for the government, if it means to assert control over the country with the authority vested in the people, to take appropriate step to wipe out this political terrorism from the society.

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# Public servants' pay fixation

An economic policy instrument, not a political gimmick

DR. MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

INCE independence, five Pay Commissions were constituted by 1997. Grades were manipulated from ten to twenty. There had always been *ad hocism* in fixation of pay scale, offer of dearness allowances in view of inflation, and other perks as and when there was clamour for pay increase, particularly when governments were in a weak position either at the beginning or at the end of their tenure, driven by political consider-

ation. To make public infrastructure and facilities available, the government shall have to spend huge amounts of money. To solve immediate social problems, the government shall have to spend heavily in educational facilities, research, technology and industrialization programs for productive employment, communication and transport facilities, population control scheme, public health, and other facilities. We may even have to save foreign exchange for effectively revaluing our currency upward, which is miserably devalued.

## Basis of pay increase

Under this economic scenario, the question arises as to whether the nation can increase the pay of the public servants at all, and if yes, by how much and why? The answer must come from per capita GDP.

## Strength of primary and secondary industries

We had no permanent body to study what should be the ideal pay structure, and the number of grades for the public servants, taking into consideration the standard of living of the entire population, national economic strength, level of unemployment, work efficiency, trade balance, social capital formation, infrastructure, performance of the institutions, rate of savings, educational expenses, inflation management, social security, taxation system and other societal costs and needs.

Already the Sunni clerics gave a declaration that the election was illegal as a large community did not participate in it. The other interesting thing is that a Sunni Governor Abdullah Al-Jabouri and his group formally filled in the papers to join the election, but his and his group's names did not appear in the final list of candidates. The Election Commission later said it was a simple mistake. There is no doubt that this was done deliberately. However, some reports already said the turnout was very low. Abu Musa Al Zarqawi also vowed to continue their fight against occupation. Thus the situation in Iraq seems very gloomy.

But all said and done, one has to see the reality too. America will never accept defeat in Iraq though they had done so in Vietnam. Here in the M-E the stake is much higher because of the presence of Israel and the great influence of the Jewish community in the United States. Indeed, Jewish influence ultimately determines the fate of US politics. May be, many Americans do not like this but it's again the reality. Israeli-Palestinian fight for over 50 years and successive American administrations' handling of the issue confirms superpower's total bias in favour of Israel. So America is likely to fight to the last. The situation in the M-E is being further complicated by the Iran factor and its nuclear ambition. New Secretary of State Dr. Rice said February 4 that 'the plan to attack Iran is simply not on the agenda at this point in time'. The words -- not on the agenda at this point in time -- are very significant. This means the option remains open. This is how Iraq attack was also built. So Iraq would obviously take this very seriously.

Here America may wait to take Britain, France and Germany on board as these EU countries are very likely to fall in ultimately stopping Iran to go nuclear. But it is very doubtful whether France and Germany would ever join America to attack Iran and put the world upside down. Britain's case is somewhat uncertain if Blair continues to remain at the helm of affairs though British people are expected to remain against any such attack. Keeping such a terribly uncertain scenario in view, the Sunnis might find it appropriate to respond to the offer of national reconciliation and join the Shias and Kurds to work out an acceptable constitution that could stop further slaughter of innocent Iraqis. In case, an acceptable agreement is found, a joint effort could be made to ask the American forces to leave Iraq though American presence in some form would continue which cannot be avoided.

Without strong and creative secondary industries, our economy, for that matter, the economy of any populous country like ours, cannot develop, as is the case now. As to our natural resources, we have some gas, but we were impatient to enter into losing contracts with foreign companies instead of gradually exploring this

plus conveyance allowance in actual train or bus fare. The annual salary is thus 2.5 times the per capita GDP. This is usually consolidated payment. The income tax is levied on the total pay minus allowance for dependents. This makes the tax equitable. If our per capita GDP is \$420 i.e. Tk.25,200 (Tk.60 to a dollar) the monthly pay for a similarly situated person comes to be Tk.4,500 plus bonus of two-months' pay.

Similarly, the annual pay for head of the government, the chief justice, parliament members, secretaries and other senior public officers may be found to be about 6-10 times per capita GDP, which may amount to Tk.10,800 to Tk.18,000 a month plus bonus equivalent to two months' salary. As pointed out by the Minister of Finance, tax must be paid on consolidated income by the beneficiary after deducting allowance for dependents. The tax may be from 5 per cent to 70 per cent in different steps.

## Reasonable pay for good living

If we assume that a graduate in public service lives in a city with his wife and two children. If he spends about 25 per cent to 30 per cent for house rent, and saves another 20 per cent out of his salary, he must live with the remaining 55 to 50 per cent of take-home pay. It is natural that government should deduct at source the premium for national pension scheme (which may be started for all citizens as a part of welfare), contribution to provident fund, premium for health insurance (which government may introduce), and income tax as applicable. If livable house is not available within his budget, his entire living structure will be uncertain. Non-availability of fast and low-cost public commuter service will add to more prob-

lems. To make public infrastructure and facilities available, the government shall have to spend huge amounts of money. To solve immediate social problems, the government shall have to spend heavily in educational facilities, research, technology and industrialization programs for productive employment, communication and transport facilities, population control scheme, public health, and other facilities. We may even have to save foreign exchange for effectively revaluing our currency upward, which is miserably devalued.

Meanwhile heavy investment

may be made for promotion and revitalization of industrialization under rational policies, building of infrastructure, establishment of local self-government, revamping of administration, human resource development and for other social needs, undaunted by poverty, which is at time, an advantage for vigorous development and increase of GDP, if government can earn the trust of the people and harness their spirit with all good intention of welfare for all.

The Commission's idea of two days off a week may sound good, but it cannot be taken so lightly. When Japan was having over-production in the early 1970s, it decided to adopt two-day holiday a week but the oil crisis made her delay its implementation. It later started with one Saturday off a month and then alternate Saturdays off every month and finally two days off a week after many years. We shall still have to work hard for many more years until our per capita GDP reaches \$3,000 to \$5,000, if not more and our quality of life is improved.

The pay fixation of public servants is a vital economic policy instrument for development. It is a very serious matter and is very much involved. It must not be handled as a political gimmick. While it must be fair, timely, and affordable, it cannot be isolated from the economic condition of the general people who really make the payment. I hope the decision makers would exercise wisdom in making the right decision and demonstrate the leadership to convince the people with all sincerity for the balanced development of the country.

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than one Taka per minute without line charge. Can we or should we drain out hard foreign exchange for the services, before we can afford it? Their windfall profits allow them buy influence and distort national economy out of balance.

The private banking sector that enjoys a spread of more than five percent between bank rate and prime rate (rate of lending to bank's best clients) is devastating the economic order and prospect of industrialization or rehabilitation of weak industries that need nurturing for some time. If the National Pay Commission compares the pay scale of these segments of the private sector with that of public servants, it will be a comparison among incomparables. The gap between bank rate and prime rate must be fixed at less than 1.5 percent at the most, and unauthorized levy (which needs the authority of parliament act) in some name or other must be banned and restricted, with such money collected so far refunded.

The Nationalized city banks which could provide a leeway to the government to restart and invigorate industrialization that can essentially improve the economic health of the nation are being subjected to the process of destruction under one pretext or other with foreign consultants, mostly taking advantage of weak and anti-developmental policy makers not interested in taking hard economic decisions.

The garment sector did give the economy some necessary relief, and the expatriate Bangladeshi remittance of \$3 billion plus annually kept the government functioning somehow without visible immediate foreign exchange crisis. The high duty on almost unrestrained imports earns revenue for the government to cover its general budget. In the name of development, we are accumulating for

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could not be unearthed and the terrorists can make their way to escape.

Taking the whole thing into consideration, one must say that it has become imperative on the part of the government to find out the actual reason behind these heinous grenade attacks on Awami League rallies. And the government should be utmost sincere in identifying those responsible for the incidents and round-up the real perpetrators. We think that the government should have a strong will and commitment to eliminate political terrorism from the country without pointing finger to the opposition leaders. The government owes it to the people of the country to take real deterrent measures to put a stop to terrorism. The opposition leaders should also extend their all-out cooperation for finding the truth giving up the blame game. Now it is the time for all the political parties to get together to safeguard the country against the machination of the terrorists.

STAR FILE PHOTO



RAB personnel picking up grenade splinters from Baidder Bazar site: Seeking clue to the carnage?

HE dastardly grenade attack on the Awami League rally on January 27 at Baidder Bazar in Habiganj district killing five persons including Shah AMS Kibria former Finance Minister and advisory council member of Awami League and seriously injuring over 100 people, was the second such grenade attack on Awami League rally after the August 21 in Dhaka killing 22 persons including Ivy Rahman, the central leader, and seriously injuring about 300 others. The terrorists have dealt another rude shock to the nation by the brutal killing of Shah AMS Kibria, one of the most educated and mild mannered politicians. The people across the country are confounded by the enormity of the tragedy, even though the grenade and bomb attacks have become a familiar method of terrorism in recent years. This indicate a very bleak future for Bangladesh. All sorts of terrorism have been increasing at an alarming rate creating a grave situation across the country. It seems that the nation has been engulfed by insanity beyond comprehension of common people.

districts on January 12 left at least 35 people injured. A recent news paper report said that, at least 148 people have so far been killed in 18 major incidents of bomb and grenade attacks in the country since March 1999.

The present government as well as its predecessor came to power with firm pledges to wipe out terrorism from the country. Surprisingly, none but one of the cases of bomb blasts and grenade attacks have had a charge-sheet submitted to the court by the police, despite occurrence of as many as 18 major bomb and grenade attacks across the country killing 148 people and injuring hundreds of others. The investigation in rest of the cases seems to have made no progress as yet. Such a failure to deal firmly with the earlier incidents of bomb and grenade attacks seems to have emboldened these fiends to go with their terrorism. Every concerned citizen now fears about where Bangladesh is heading for, as one by one Awami League leaders are falling victims to political terrorism. The ambassadors of the European Union's diplomatic missions in Dhaka also observed that

failure to investigate previous grenade and bomb attacks has created an anarchic situation. They expressed their observation in a joint statement issued on January 28. It is learnt from the media report that terrorists, who carried out last year's grenade attacks on the Awami League rally at B.B. Avenue, Dhaka and on British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Chowdhury in Sylhet, used the same Arges brand grenade on the Awami League rally at Boidder Bazar in Habiganj. After inspecting the spot and examining the pieces of evidence, a bomb squad of Rapid Action Battalion identified the grenades. It reveals that an organized gang of terrorist has been mounting the attacks one after another, and at least half a dozen of country's intelligence agencies have miserably failed to nab a single perpetrator even with the help of Interpol and FBI experts! It is now for the government, if it means to assert control over the country with the authority vested in the people, to take appropriate step to wipe out this political terrorism from the society.

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