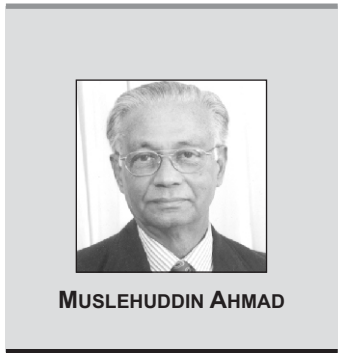


Bush claims 'resounding success' in Iraq elections!



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

PRESIDENT Bush said, It was a "resounding success" in the democratic process of Iraq though he acknowledged that they have to go a long way to establish it. In the State of the Union address on February 2, 05, President Bush boasted of his success in Iraq and his vision to "spread democracy" in the Middle East. Interesting as it was, he also referred to the statement of one of the former US presidents who had said "the wisdom can come only from God and not from any man". Here President Bush is absolutely right and he deserves appreciation for his Faith in God. But it appears that whatever wisdom was gifted by God to him was later punctured by the bad whisper of Cheney-Rumsfeld and that led to his invasion of Iraq. Because one believes that Almighty God never gives any wisdom that leads to invasion of a sovereign country resulting in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children.

There were 44 standing ovations during one-hour State of Union speech—something similar that I, as Bangladesh Ambassador, used to see in Romanian parliament whenever late President Ceaucescu delivered his address on his vision of democracy in Romania. However, here the difference is that President Bush spoke of democracy in other countries and not in his own where election winning manoeuvres like those in Florida, Ohio etc are just taken as normal in the democratic practice. Any way, President Bush totally changed his position from WMD in Iraq for which he went for the invasion to "democracy" that is a catch-word and passion for every one in the United States and elsewhere.

Yes, it was a "resounding success" as many of two ethnic groups of people went to the polling stations to cast their votes under the "unprecedented" military protection of the occupation forces, of course, supported by the newly established Iraqi forces too. But the process has divided Iraq ethnically as one ethnic group boycotted the election. However, only going to the polling station to vote as a mark of revenge against Saddam's ill treatment to the majority Shia population does not mean democracy has been established in Iraq..

Democracy means participation of all citizens in the democratic process without intimidation and outside interference to choose their representatives to run the government 'of the people and for the people'. Here one large community -- Sunnites -- has been left out of the election process. Though they had legitimate concern over holding election under occupation forces, they finally wanted to participate in the election but asked for time of some six months to sort out the security situation. Undoubtedly it was not an appropriate security situation to hold any credible election where all could participate. This was proved by the fact that about 40 people have been killed during the election day and the British C-130 was brought down apparently by the 'insurgents' fire killing 10 British troops. This was certainly not the appropriate environment to hold the election. But it

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 security, no food, no electricity, no gas etc. Saddam kept Shias, Sunnites, Kurds together to make one sovereign Iraq, but today Iraq stands ethnically divided -- may even fall apart any time, -- a "re-sounding 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.

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 the 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 turn out was very low. Abu Musa Al Zargawi also vowed to continue their fight against occupation. Thus the situation in Iraq seems very gloomy. However, in order to show higher turnout, there could be foul play in the form of filling up the ballot boxes with extra ballot papers while these are being transported to the central location in Baghdad for counting.

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 up. So Iran 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 fail 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 Sunnites 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.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

Public servants' pay fixation

An economic policy instrument, not a political gimmick

DR. MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

SINCE 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 consideration.

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.

The duty of a responsible government is to maintain an economic balance in society as a whole, to encourage balanced GDP distribution among primary (agriculture, forestry, fishery, etc.), secondary (manufacturing, construction, mining, etc.) and tertiary (service, government, transport, etc.) industries. At the early developing stage, primary industry accounts for a higher share of GDP followed by secondary and tertiary industries. There is limited scope for Bangladesh to increase GDP in primary industries because of land constraint. It is the secondary industries that must contribute to the real GDP to support tertiary industries for a higher standard of living.

Unfortunately, our economy is fragile. Knowingly or unknowingly we are destroying whatever capacity we had in manufacturing. About 1,560 industrial units were sick, if not dead by now, 350 industries were closed in the last three decades in the northern districts, pushing about 150,000 workers directly and many more indirectly out of a job and idling about Tk 2,200 crore investment. Many industries set up in BSCIC industrial estates are also closed or limping. Our once-proud prime industries, the 50-year-old Adamjee Jute mills with about 30,000 workers, Chittagong steel mill, Khulna newspaper mill, and machine tool factory, among others, are closed or are being degenerated into real-estate property or are in the process of incapacitation or dismantling instead of rehabilitation -- a blow to vital industrial capacity building for high value-added production, despite rhetoric to the contrary. The superficial justification for this nationally irresponsible act is their loss-making, encouraged or allowed for years without counter-measures. This is like cutting off the head because of headache, which any rational policy, perhaps, would not have allowed.

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

resource ourselves, despite the fact that we had both organizations and experience, and also all the opportunity to buy or attract the necessary technology. Even now there is ominous sign of attempts to outsmart the general people and to export gas in some guise or other. There may be media stunt of huge reserve and prospect, but the reality is that with the start of real industrialization, which any nationalist or developmental government must undertake, we may even have to import gas or other energy quite soon.

Service sector in wrong priority sequence

There are people, specially agents of foreign interest, who are claiming great development in mobile phone service at prohibitive rates in the absence of competing BTB service, though planned long ago, which could easily be offered profitably at less

resource loans under any condition whatsoever even for non-productive service. We have not been capable enough to be selective in inward foreign investment, though we must be, to protect national interest. We already repay about Taka 951 crore a year in interest on foreign loans, which is going to increase further.

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. The salary structure of developed countries may also give us a reference. The per capita GDP of Japan is about \$20,000, and that of the US is about \$35,000. A 30-year qualified employee in Japan may get \$3,000 a month and about \$48,000 per year including bonus equivalent to four months' salary

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.

Adverse effect

If we suddenly increase the public servants' pay, the entire society will be affected. There may be agitation in the industrial sector including garment sector for pay rise, which might immediately affect their competitiveness. As per National Pay Commission Report, there will be required an additional amount of Taka of 5,249 crore (\$875 million at Tk.60 to a Dollar), a 48.70 per cent increase and an amount 50 to 70 per cent of what we borrow a year from external sources. Where will the money come from? As is known, every amount spent by government comes from present, past, or future tax. The increase in pension is reasonable. All other changes must involve proportionate reduction in manpower and payment of tax on consolidated income including all allowances except that for transport. After streamlining the pay and tax system in a year or so, the reasonable pay increase may be implemented over about 3 to 5 years.

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 overproduction 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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SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Already the Sunni clerics gave a declaration that the election was illegal as a large community did not participate in it. Some reports already said the turn out was very low. Abu Musa Al Zargawi also vowed to continue their fight against occupation. Thus the situation in Iraq seems very gloomy.



PHOTO AFP

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 dishonoured 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, Samarra etc) were reduced to rubles. 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

Grenade and bomb attack: Worst political terrorism

A.N. M. NURUL HAQUE

THE 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.

The attack on Awami League and their allied organisations have increased significantly during the tenure of the present government of BNP led four-party alliance. But the two particular attacks on August-21 and most recent January 27 have added an immeasurable dimension to the dirty culture of political vendetta in our country. These two particular attacks have struck the whole nation with awe and also have outraged the world conscience. What the people of this country have witnessed on August 21 and January 27, may have a lasting impact on the course of politics in Bangladesh and also determine whether we will shrink back to the dark age of terrorism and violence or make amends to shape our future in the light of civilised democratic norms.

Very recently, terrorists hurled bombs at the tent of the folk opera in two remote villages in Bogra and Natore in the early hours on January 15. At least two persons were killed and 60 others injured. Earlier on December 22, criminals hurled three bombs on a musical soiree and stage show in Bogra leaving 15 people injured. Bomb attacks on two cultural functions in Jamalpur and Sherpur

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 on 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 by the people, to take appropriate step to wipe out this political terrorism from the society.

As it appears from the repeated wave of violent activities, the coun-

try is now in the grip of political terrorism. Politically motivated violence has been used through ages. Violence is a general term to describe behaviour, usually deliberate, that causes or intends to cause harm to people. Politically motivated violence is commonly referred to actions against others with the intended purpose of effecting a change. It has been said that violence is the last option of a desperate man. Are we as a nation in such a desperation?

Of all terrorist offences in Bangladesh, the grenade attacks on Awami League rally on August 21 and on January 27 undoubtedly were among the most heinous crimes against humanity. The criminals have been playing duck and drake with the lives of the innocent general people taking opportunity of the feud between the two major political parties and their tendency to blame each other for any such turmoil. It is really very unfortunate for the nation that whenever there is any terrorist bomb blast or grenade attack the government and the main opposition party accuse each other and the heinous crimes

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.

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