

Making democracy work

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN AND GHULAM RAHMAN

THE pros and cons of the caretaker government (CTG) reform proposals made by the opposition alliances merit open-minded review. Finding an EC chairman acceptable to all parties may be difficult but not impossible. Putting the defense department under the CTG may be illogical, but what prompted such a demand warrants some serious attention. The demand that war criminals be disqualified is probably a forward looking item in the menu of the reforms agenda. But none of these are reasons enough to spawn an outright rejection.

The demand for a politically neutral CTG, elimination of black money and the terror of ruling party activists, and neutrality of EC officials including the EC chairman, are what everyone wants. People with criminal records, loan defaulters, and black money holders belong in prison and must be barred from the election process. If democracy is to be functional these and similar such demands cannot be trampled.

After being ruptured by fifteen-plus years of various military dictatorships and presidential rules, the country started its trials and tribulations with a shaky parliamentary democracy in 1991. Although, three parliamentary elections were held between 1991 and 2001 under the CTG, the nascent democracy is still evolving with the recurrence of antagonistic environment of the period of 1973-75. Intellectuals and political observers at home and abroad have raised eyebrows about the potential demise of democracy in the country.

Professor Adam Przeworski of New York University conducted an extensive study which included every transition to democracy around the globe. The study found that once a country passes \$6,000 in per capita GDP it is virtually guaranteed to succeed in its transition to democracy. Countries with per capita GDP between \$3,000 and \$6,000 have less than a 50-50 chance of continuing as democracies; and those below \$3,000 have

virtually no chance of survival of a functional democracy. Throughout human history, about 70 democracies which have collapsed over time -- all happened in poorer countries -- whereas as many as 35 democracies prevailed over a span of 1,000 years under more economic affluence. Affluent democracies survived multitudes of problems: wars, riots, scandals, and economic and governmental crises.

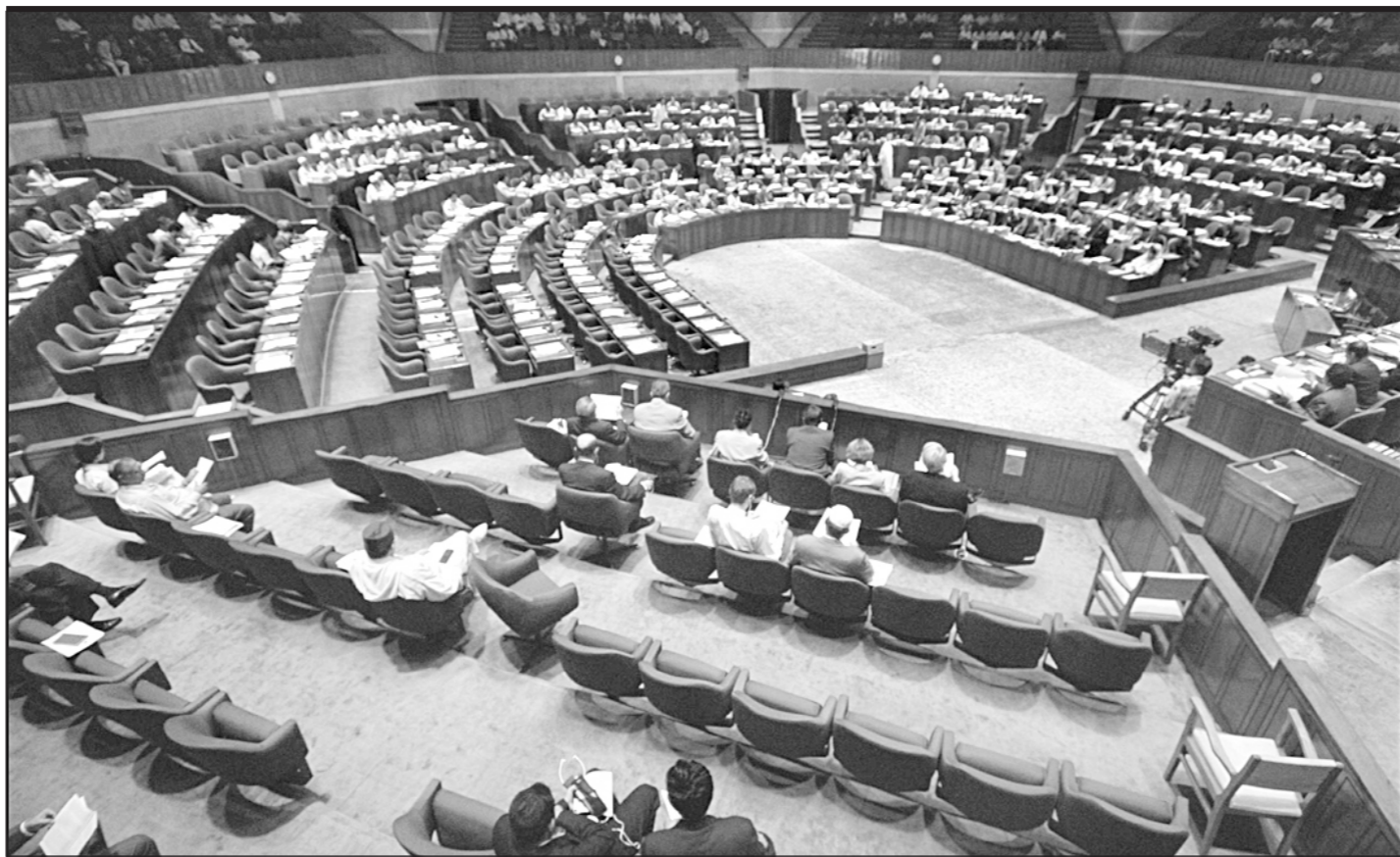
Professor Przeworski estimated that the probability that democracy survives increases monotonically with per capita GDP. For example, between 1951 and 1999, the probability that a democracy would fall during any particular year in countries with per capita income under \$1,000 is suggests that their expected life is about 11 years. With incomes ranged \$1,001 to \$3,000, the expected duration is roughly 27 years. For income level between \$3,001 and \$6,055, the probability is 78 years of expected life. And above \$6,055, democracies are expected to last forever.

One might question then: How did democracy survive in the US in the 18th and 19th century when US per capita GDP was well below \$3,000, like today's Bangladesh? Perhaps it is not the low income itself that causes a democracy to collapse, but rather the same factors that contribute to income also breaks down democracy. A democratic society in the 19th century that didn't confront those undesirable factors present still would have had -- at least by late 20th century standards -- low per capita GDP.

But it would have had the right blend of cultural elements and other attributes that enormously complemented to foster and sustain a democracy and utilise scientific and technological innovations. In the context of Bangladesh, low per capita GDP of less than \$2,500 is not the only problem weakening democratic institutions; all other chronic maladies such as political infighting, lack of rule of law, corruption, and slow adaptation of scientific and technological advances pose a serious threat to democracy.

Another important stigma that stands in the way of realising a full-

A democracy that evolves within the unique economic, religious, and cultural complexities of a nation will be an everlasting democracy. As democracy itself evolves through various transitional stages so would the institution of the caretaker government and the election commission need reform. In the process, what looks workable today may need further refinement along the way as the ideas evolve. This underscores exactly what democracy is all about.



House half empty: When was the last time this chamber was full?

fledged liberal democracy in Bangladesh is the lack of tradition of democracy in countries with Muslim majority. According to the Freedom House's 2005 annual report of the world's 192 countries, 121 are electoral democracies. However, only 11 of the 47 nations with Muslim majority have democratically elected governments -- thus a non-Islamic country is more than three times likely to be democratic than an Islamic state. However, not all democracies are free countries, where people enjoy a broad range

of rights. A few of the countries like Bangladesh are rated partly democratic where corruption, dominance of ruling parties, intimidation of the print media, and sometimes ethnic or religious strife are the norm.

Here is an interesting empirical testing of survivability of democracies based on two competing theories: Theories of Democratic Consolidation (TDC) and Theories of Democratic Honey moons (TDH). The TDC assert that new democracies are more vulnerable to breakdown, while the TDH claim that new

democracies are less vulnerable to breakdown. The study attempted these seeming contradictory hypotheses by using a data set that included all democracies from 1951 to 1995. Using both continuous and discrete specifications of a honey-moon period, the study tested whether new democracies experience an absolute honeymoon (whether newness in itself makes them less prone to breakdown) or a relative honeymoon (where newness insulates them from the effect of poor economic performance).

The results implied that there was a short-lived absolute honeymoon, but that new democracies were actually more vulnerable to effects of low per capita GDP prior to their third legislative election.

A vast majority of the countries in the world that have low per capita GDP also have their populations lack the values and abilities and customs needed to make liberal democracy or even semi-liberal democracy function. In Bangladesh, we are self-deceiving and always try to avoid self-criticism and self-evalu-

ations, worse yet, we are intolerant to objective criticism by the media and intellectual discourse about our shortcomings. Being rational and tolerant is not in our nature and traditions. We win a hard fought election and then hunt down our opponents instead of being generous to them for making the election competitive. After failing to win a majority in the parliament to form a government, we cannot accept being a minority party. Our disagreement with the ruling party results in hartals and violent protests. The ruling party resorts to lathi charge and tear gas explosion instead of debate. The country has virtually been under one party system for the last four years regardless of which party is at fault. This is autocracy in the guise of democracy.

Before rejecting the CTG reform proposals, the BNP must revisit the factors that culminated with its debacle after the Magura by-election on March 20, 1994. The long spell of hartals that followed paralysed all economic activities, and in an effort to hold on to power the ruling BNP organised a make-believe national election only to manipulate a landslide victory by large scale vote rigging in an overwhelming voter boycotted poll. The non-stop street agitations at home and diplomatic embarrassments abroad brought the government to its knees to transfer power to a CTG.

The constitution was amended for a system of CTG to hold free and fair election within 90 days. Although the election that followed which brought AL to power was acclaimed as free and fair, the BNP minority resorted to hartals and street protests on flimsy grounds. Non-stop hartal calls by BNP from February 9 to 11, February 23 to 25, 1999, and many subsequent hartals and street agitations destroyed nearly a dozen lives and tens of millions worth of property and economic output. The next general election was held in October 2001 in which the BNP-led alliance won two-third majority in the parliament. The AL could not take the loss with grace and humility and resorted to pay back what BNP did four years

ago to AL, and the country is back to political deadlock.

In 1998, Western diplomats and Bangladesh business organisations made several demands for compromises by all parties to avoid protest strikes. Although the economy was opened for FDI in the early 1990s, there has been little or no gains in foreign financial capital. Watching the deteriorating political and economic situation from the sidelines, the EU issued warning in March 1999 that "lack of respect for elementary principles of democratic governance" was seriously hampering development prospects. The same warnings are ringing once again from the same countries and institutions except the warnings are louder and more ominous. The former US ambassador Mr. Harry Thomas even raised the spectre of an alternative if the current confrontational politics continues unresolved.

With low per capita income, lack of democratic values and traditions as the hallmark of a Muslim country, coupled with other age-old endemic problems, we all must work relentlessly as a cohesive force to defy and defeat all the negatives that threaten our democracy. Caretaker government, although home grown, is a unique feature in our democracy, which came into being because of distrust of the ruling party's election rigging maneuverings in the past.

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The authors are, respectively, Professor of Economics, Eastern Michigan University and former Secretary to the government of Bangladesh.

Lessons for the Islamic world

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SINCE the terrorist bombing in London on July 7, there have been a number of articles published dealing with the causes and effects of the bomb attack. Most of the writers argued that the attacks were the result of frustration and hopelessness of the Muslim community the world over. They cited two principal reasons: first, the West's foreign policy in the Middle East that favours Israel at the expense of the Palestinians and second, the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. They primarily blamed the US President George Bush and the British PM Tony Blair for alienating the Muslim community and giving boost to the extremist elements within it. One of them suggested that since the West would not be able to defeat Al-Qaeda, they should negotiate peace with them as the British did with the IRA in Ireland. However, I would argue that even if the Palestinian state is established and the Western troops depart from Afghanistan or the Middle East, Islamic religious extremism and violence is not going to go away.

Reaction of the Muslim community after London bombing was predictable. There was at first the denial and the usual conspiracy theory. Later, as all four bombers were found to be Muslims, the apologists came up with the plea that these people do not represent Islam and the Muslim Ummah. The British Muslim community leaders were at pains to explain that the extremists do not represent the vast majority of Muslims in UK. It is true that the vast majority in any society is hard-working, law-abiding citizen, but even if 0.001 percent of the 1.6 million British Muslims have extremist leanings, the Brits have about 1,600 potential suicide bombers to worry about. The Muslim community leaders' repeated assertion in the media that they were unaware of the Islamic extremism in the UK proves that either they were unfit to be community leaders or they were concealing the truth. Muslim ghettos in the West are fertile ground for religious extremism. A Muslim youth in UK can't go to the pub, would not be seen in Leicester Square in the evening, nor afford a Wimbledon ticket. Cut off from the political, economic, and cultural mainstream of the nation, he or she has only one place to socialise -- the mosque. There, thanks to the mostly illiterate Mullahs hired from back home, the kids were constantly bombarded with obscurantist religious dogmas. Added to this was the large injection of Middle Eastern money that financed ornate mosques with towering minarets while the local school was in disrepair for lack of funds. Think of the fanaticism of the parents who sent their children from UK to study in

madrassas in Pakistan! Now the parents are pleading innocence; indeed they are a party to the crime.

The religious extremism in Islam is not a new phenomenon. Islam has seen civil wars and unrest from its infancy that resulted in a weak and fragmented society unable to cope with change. Religious leaders, often in collusion with the not-so-religious despotic rulers, created dogmas that throttled the growth of free thinking and scientific research in the society. Many of the Muslim litterateurs, scientists, philosophers, doctors, whom we revere today, were in their times declared heretics, thrown in prison and died

of hopelessness that gave birth to an exclusive reformist movement in Arabia popularly known as the "Wahabi" movement.

Islamic extremism that we see today is fuelled mainly by the "Wahabi" doctrine that rejects modernity and accepts literal interpretation of the religious scriptures. They believe that it is an essential duty of the Muslims to do jihad to establish supremacy of Islam. According to them, all non-Muslims are enemies. Muslims who do not subscribe Wahabi doctrine are dubbed apostates or deviants. There is an on-going struggle within the Muslim societies between the

anti-Soviet War in Afghanistan many Pakistani madrassas went into the hands of the jihadis, at the behest of their American and Pakistani sponsors at the time. Much of the Taliban leadership was trained in Pakistani madrassas and so were the recent British bombers. With abundant finance pouring in from the ME, the numbers of madrassas and their students continue to soar throughout the world. The jihadis are not only fighting the non-Muslims, they are fighting among themselves too. Brutal Shia-Sunni ethnic clashes in Pakistan have been taking toll for many years. Now in Iraq most of the suicide

this is an escape from extreme hopelessness and boredom and a sure way to enter the eternal bliss of heaven. In an exclusive interview published in Time magazine only a few weeks back, an Iraqi suicide volunteer, waiting for his turn, stated that his target would be the American soldiers, but if innocent civilians get caught he wouldn't be sorry because they too would instantly go to heaven. Such is the logic!

One positive fallout of the London bombing has been the public admission of the British Muslims that the extremist cells exist and that the community must join together to combat the extremist ideology. The mere repetition that the extremists do not represent true Islam will not do; the extremists will have to be confronted militarily, socially, and politically. What lessons do we have to learn from the London bombing? I believe quite a few.

First of all, we need to depoliticise Islam and reinforce the secular values in our public life. The mosques should be a place for prayer, meditation, and contemplation, and not a sanctuary of religious extremists. Democratic institutions that are gradually taking roots in the Islamic world should be carefully nurtured. Despotic rulers using religion as a vehicle to further their grip on power should be removed and here the world community could play a very positive role. Educational reform in much of the Muslim world is long overdue. There is a need to spread modern secular education in the community. As fallout of the terrorist activities, Muslim immigration to Europe or America might be curtailed. Muslim students might find admission to top schools of the West and in high-tech subjects increasingly difficult. As a part of the national security measures, Muslims might be denied access to high-end technology by the West. The technology divide between the Islamic states and the rest of the world might continue to widen. Can we allow that to happen? What future are we preparing for our next generation?

At home, we need to have a hard look at the religious education curricula.

Aim of education is to produce citizen with high moral and ethical standard. We need to contemplate, "Why, despite the overdose of religious education, corruption is endemic in much of the Islamic world?" Why our ethical standard is so poor? We are too much obsessed with our religious identity forgetting that we belong to a much wider world where there are other religions, cultures, and nationalities, each with its own varieties and richness. Let us enjoy the rich diversity of human civilisation that God in his infinite wisdom has bestowed on us. Let us hope that beyond the dark clouds of anxiety and doubt there is new hope and vision.

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Why the leak probe matters

The bigger question is what this scandal does to the CIA's ability to develop essential "humint" (human intelligence). Here's where the Iraq War comes in again. The sooner we beef up our intelligence, the sooner we crack the insurgency and get to bring our troops home.

JONATHAN ALTER

LIKE a lot of President Bush's critics, I supported the Iraq War at first. Because of the evidence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction laid out by Colin Powell, I agreed that we needed to disarm Saddam Hussein. I even think it's possible that 25 years from now, historians will conclude that the Iraq War helped accelerate the modernising of the Middle East, even if it doesn't fully democratise it.

But if that happens, Bush might not get as much credit as he hopes, and not just because most historians, as Richard Nixon liked to say, are liberals. Bush may look bad because his leadership on Iraq has been a fiasco. He didn't plan for it: the early decisions that allowed the insurgency to get going were breathtakingly incompetent. He didn't pay for it: Bush is the first president in history to cut taxes during a war, this one now costing nearly \$1 billion a week. And most important of all, he didn't tell the American people the truth about it: taking a nation to war is the most solemn duty of a president, and he'd better make certain there's no alternative and no doubt about the evidence.

Why do I mention this now? Because for all of the complexities of the Valerie Plame case, for all the questions raised about the future of investigative journalism and the fate of the most influential aide to an American president since Louis Howe served Franklin D. Roosevelt 70 years ago, this story is fundamentally about how easy it was to get into Iraq and how hard it will be to get out.

We got in because we "cooked" the intelligence, then hyped it. That's why the "Downing Street Memo" is not a smoking gun but a big "duh." For two years we've known that senior White House officials were determined to, in the words of the British intelligence memo, "fix" the intelligence to suit their policy decisions. When someone crossed them, they would "fix" him, too, as career ambassador Joseph Wilson found when he came back from Africa with a report that threw cold water on the story that Saddam Hussein sought yellowcake uranium from Niger.

Was Plame "fair game," as Karl Rove told Chris Matthews? George H.W. Bush didn't think so. Even after Wilson embarrassed the president publicly, Bush Sr. wrote Wilson whom he had appointed to various ambassadorial posts to congratulate him for his service and sympathise with him over the outing of his wife. The old man was head of the CIA in the 1970s and knows the consequences of blowing the identi-

ties of covert operatives.

But does his son? A real leader wouldn't hide behind Clintonian legalisms like "I don't want to prejudge." Even if the disclosure was unintentional and no law was broken, Rove's confirmed conduct talking casually to two reporters without security clearances about a CIA operative -- was dangerous and wrong. As GOP congressman turned talk-show host Joe Scarborough puts it, if someone in his old congressional office did what Rove unquestionably did, that someone would have been promptly fired, just as the president promised in this case. Scarborough, no longer obligated to toe the pathetic Republican Party line, says it's totally irrelevant if Joe Wilson is a preening partisan who misled investigators about the role his wife played in recommending his Niger trip. The frantic efforts of the GOP hit squads to change the subject to Wilson show their fears that Rove the master of their universe will be

more sensitive than "official cover" (pretending to work for another government agency). The GOP's spinners are making it seem that because Plame had a desk job in Langley at the time she was outed, she wasn't truly undercover. As Mahle says, that reflects a total ignorance about the way the CIA works. Being outed doesn't just waste millions of taxpayer dollars; it compromises hundreds of other people in the field you may have worked with in the past.

If Bush isn't a hypocrite on national security, he needs, at a minimum, to yank Rove's security clearance. "Whether you do it (discuss the identity of CIA operatives) intentionally or unintentionally, you have not met the requirements of that security clearance," Mahle told me.

The bigger question is what this scandal does to the CIA's ability to develop essential "humint" (human intelligence). Here's where the Iraq War comes in again. The sooner we beef up our intelligence, the sooner we

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Pakistani demonstrators after London terror attacks.

at the hands of assassins. (The word "assassin" is derived from Arabic word "hassasin" -- hashish addicted followers of 11th century cult leader Hassan Sabah responsible for the murder of many Muslim leaders and intellectuals of the time.) The Islamic world missed the Renaissance and the subsequent scientific-industrial revolution that occurred in Europe in during the 14-17th centuries. When the colonial invasion came, the Islamic world was a few centuries behind Europe in learning and was easily conquered. By the 18th century, the Islamic world had sunk into a state

extreme traditionalists and the moderates, which goes beyond Palestine, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

The moderate-extremist divide among the Muslims in South Asia in the 19th century resulted in the establishment of two educational institutions -- Aligarh Muslim University and Dar ul Uloom Madrasa in Deobandh, both in northern India. While Aligarh represented a synthesis of western and Islamic ideology, Deobandh was inspired by the Wahabi movement. Most of the madrassas in South Asia are run on Deobandi curriculum which used to be peaceful and apolitical. During

bombers are Sunnis aiming to inflict maximum casualties on the Shias.

It is often difficult for ordinary people to comprehend what could motivate so many young people to die. The bombers are generally from disadvantaged segments of society. Poor parents with large numbers of children are often pressured to sacrifice one of their wards in the way of Allah. Did you ever hear any of the Mufiti's or Ayatullah's sons dying in a suicide bombing? Suicide bombers are brainwashed to such religious frenzy that they can bomb a mosque full of worshippers or a school full of children. To them



Bush's brain? Presidential advisor Karl Rove in hot water.

held accountable for his destructive carelessness.

To get an idea of how destructive, I talked to Melissa Mahle, a former CIA covert operative turned author whose career parallels Plame's. She explained what happens when someone's cover is blown. It isn't pretty, especially when, like Plame, you have been under "nonofficial cover" (working for a phony front company or nonprofit), which is

crack the insurgency and get to bring our troops home. What does it say to the people doing the painstaking work of building those spy networks when the identity of one of their own becomes just another weapon in the partisan wars of Washington? For a smart guy, Karl Rove was awfully stupid.

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