

Iraq's elections: What next?



HARUN UR RASHID

ON December 15, ten to eleven million eligible Iraqis are reported to have voted for the country's landmark election for a four year Parliament. The Bush administration hopes that the outcome of the election would boost the prospect of drawing minority Sunnis (nearly 25 percent of the total population) into the political process, thus ending the insurgency since Saddam's downfall in April 2003, and paving the way for an exit of US-led foreign troops.

Although final results are not expected for at least two weeks, the results are not expected to immediately install a government because the sectarian factions have to go through political "horse trading" before they come up with a government. It may be recalled the current interim government was in place only after two months of political wrangling among the elected politicians after the election results were published.

Will election bring stability in Iraq?

The simple answer appears to be in the negative, primarily because the Iraqi constitution, adopted this year, under the Shi'a and Kurd dominated Parliament needs to be amended to satisfy the Sunnis.

Political observers believe that the outcome of elections may not end the insurgency because the current constitution is not acceptable to Sunnis as they are out of the loop from oil revenues. According to them, the constitution is a recipe for disintegration of Iraq into three countries, leading to total collapse of the Iraqi state.

The Sunni MPs will demand for amendments of the constitution because they accepted participation in the election on the promise that the constitution would be revisited for amendments with a view to redressing the grievances

BOTTOM LINE

Unless all the major factions -- Shi'as, Sunnis and Kurds -- address the issues and reconcile among themselves, the new Iraq is likely to continue to be a destabilizing factor in the Middle East. The Rumsfeld doctrine: "If you want to beat the hell out of a place, do so and get out" -- seems to be misplaced in the current situation in Iraq as the Pentagon under Rumsfeld cannot easily get out from Iraq.



Iraqis queuing for casting ballots

of the Sunnis. There lies the first hurdle for the elected MPs in the coming months. And this could be a big ask given the

vested interests of the different factions among the Iraqi political leaders.

Another fact to note is that the participation of Sunnis in election will strengthen their hand in the new Parliament. They are likely to play a role that was not available to them in the last Parliament. Unless their concerns are addressed, the insurgency is likely to intensify and continue in the country.

There are other factors that deserve mention:

The election took place in the country under occupation of foreign forces. Observers including the US-based Human Rights Watch believe under the current circumstances, the election cannot be fair and free. The TV footage showed empty roads as curfew was imposed on the day of election -- a strategy devised by the US-led forces. Such strategy cannot be an environment for democratic elections.

Second, it was the US Administrator Paul Bremer in 2003 who had injected the sectarian division among Iraqis by his deliberate actions in favouring Shi'as and Kurds in preference to

Sunnis who were marginalized in the administration in Iraq. All Sunnis were deemed to be supporters of Saddam Hussein and accordingly they were suspects.

Third, the Shi'a dominated interim government of Al-Jaafari followed the trend of Bremer and has been totally against the Baathists and does not want their inclusion within the administration. If such attitude lingers on, stability is likely to elude the country.

Fourth, the Cairo Declaration of Arab League in November, endorsed by all Iraqi factions, has called for a timetable for withdrawal of foreign forces. It demon-

strates the uneasiness of ordinary Iraqis about the presence of foreign forces in the country and also provides a signal to Shi'as to reach out to Sunnis for reconciliation on national issues.

Exit strategy

It seems from media reports that the current strength of US forces (160,000) is likely to be reduced from the beginning of next year as the Bush administration is under extreme pressure from the Congress. No more the Republican dominated Congress responds meekly to the dictates of the White House. For example, President Bush had to agree with the anti-torture laws that will prohibit torture or inflicting degrading treatment to detainees both in the US and overseas. The law was initiated by Senator McCain.

Furthermore, the Congress adopted a resolution in recent times demanding regular progress reports on the war on Iraq from the President and urged the President to hand over power quickly to Iraqis.

Conclusion

Although the election took place in a relatively calm and eerie atmosphere, there seems to be a hard road for Iraqi politicians to tread on. Mature political judgment is required for all factions to resolve the burning issues confronting them. It is not an easy task.

Unless all the major factions -- Shi'as, Sunnis and Kurds -- address the issues and reconcile among themselves, the new Iraq is likely to continue to be a destabilizing factor in the Middle East. The Rumsfeld doctrine: "If you want to beat the hell out of a place, do so and get out" -- seems to be misplaced in the current situation in Iraq as the Pentagon under Rumsfeld cannot easily get out from Iraq. The question is, has the Bush administration learned its lesson?

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Do we really need to build a cancer hospital now?

Before venturing to build a cancer hospital by purchasing expensive machines and equipment, far greater priority should be devoted towards developing a team of personnel in all the crucial issues related to cancer management. Our doctors have immense potential -- proven on several occasions in many countries of the world. If they are sent on scholarships for training from the budget of cancer hospital to training hospitals in the developed countries, it will be more useful for patients before importing the expensive machines.

MANZUR MORSHED

From some time on there has been a serious effort from a charity organization in the country to build a cancer hospital to offer treatment to thousands of cancer patients of the country. This noble initiative has been warmly welcomed by all quarters as every year many cancer patients die without proper treatment and many go abroad incurring huge economic losses for the country. A good number of generous people, including business magnates as well as school children, have already come forward with their donations, and it is anticipated that many more would come forward.

The initiative is so noble and the need seems to be so obvious that no question has been raised about the urgency of undertaking the costly endeavour of building a state of the art cancer hospital in the country. But a deeper look into the problems of cancer treatment and realities on the ground raises some questions about establishing the proposed state of the art cancer hospital.

The country presently has one government funded National Institute of Cancer Research & Hospital at Mohakhali, Dhaka. Banghabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital and almost all medical college hospitals have arrangements for cancer treatment. All these facilities are far too little compared to the needs of the cancer patients of the country.

The first step in managing cancer is proper diagnosis. It means determining the exact type of cancer and the extent to which it has spread in the body. In most cases, throughout the world (and especially in a low income country like ours) cancer is usually diagnosed at a very late stage when the cancer had already spread widely throughout the body. Once the diagnosis is confirmed the single management issue is to decide whether there is any curative option available. In most cases the answer is negative. The next question is, do we have any management options in the vast majority of incurable cases? Here comes the role of cancer hospital.

Although a great effort would be exerted to pursue cure, taking care of the incurable patients will constitute a cancer hospital's main responsibility.

The job of reducing the pain and sufferings of the incurable ones lies with a medical specialty called palliative care. This service is led by physicians but includes nurses, paramedics, social workers, etc. Through this specialty is not specific for cancer patients, rather any patient suffering from painful and incurable disease can be managed by palliative specialty, cancer patients are the largest beneficiary of palliative care. An incurable patient with cancer receives chemotherapy or radiation therapy from cancer physicians in close consultation and collaboration with palliative specialists for meaningful prolongation of life or for comfortable terminal life. When pain or depression engulfs a cancer victim, this palliative service attempts to treat or alleviate those symptoms.

In the context of Bangladesh, we have to consider other aspects of cancer treatment, as well. When a patient is made aware of the diagnosis of cancer, the patient or the patient's family becomes desperate to bring cure to this and gets ready to spend everything. Many a times the family sell their properties, interrupt the education of children but at the end the patient dies leaving the family destitute with a huge burden of debt. Addressing such issues needs careful assessment of several non-medical aspects of the patient in addition to the medical issues.

A coordinated multidisciplinary approach is essential to manage cancer patients both for curative or palliative purposes that can only be delivered by a well-organized institution born out of a carefully conceived plan. With money it will be easy to procure expensive new machines for investigation or to build fancy buildings. But we need more than money to utilize these facilities for the real benefit of the patients and their families. For instance, palliative medicine specialty is non-existent in any medical institute in Bangladesh. Medical oncology is still in infancy; whereas it is

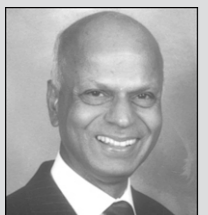
a well developed specialty in all developed and most developing countries. Cancer chemotherapy, which belongs to the field of medical oncology remains the dominion of radiation oncologists in our country.

Before venturing to build a cancer hospital by purchasing expensive machines and equipments, far greater priority should be devoted towards developing a team of personnel in all the crucial issues related to cancer management. Our doctors have immense potential proven on several occasions in many countries of the world. If they are sent on scholarships for training from the budget of cancer hospital to training hospitals in the developed countries, it will be more useful for patients before importing the expensive machines. Similarly nurses and paramedics should also be sent for training.

Once we have the trained personnel, we need to address the issue of adequate remuneration so that these skilled people can devote their full energy for the service of cancer patients without having to worry about private practice or finding other ways to supplement their regular earnings. Adequate remuneration would also be essential for keeping the overseas trained and internationally competent personnel from taking up a job abroad and leaving the country. In my humble opinion once the issue of developing and then retaining a well-organized team of competent human resources is resolved, the noble initiative of building a dedicated cancer hospital with sophisticated machines will bring benefits to the people who are in dire need of such facility.

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Climate change: After Montreal what?



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MONTREAL seems to be the right place for the purpose of holding difficult international conferences on environmental matters, which after long negotiations finally end in success. The city hosted its first international conference on atmospheric changes in 1987. The objective was to sign an international pact for eliminating chemicals that harmed the ozone layer. As a result of the successful implementation of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which was negotiated at that conference, ozone-harming chemicals called chloro-fluoro-carbons (CFCs), have to a large extent been phased out.

Montreal has just hosted a mega-conference on environmental matters and again with success this time it was the United Nations Conference on Climate Change. True, according to some analysts, it has achieved only partial success. Formally known as the 11th Conference of the Parties, it was attended by delegates from more than 180 countries, and representatives of many business and non-governmental organisations.

According to unofficial estimates, approximately ten thousand people participated in the meeting, in one capacity or the other. But this time, the objectives were far more ambitious. The main purpose of the summit was to forge a new international agreement on cutting greenhouse gas emissions after 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expires.

After shameful foot-dragging by the Bush administration which was bent on halting the process altogether, in other words, to kill off the Kyoto Protocol, the summit ended in an agreement, which was described by the

Independent of London as "the biggest breakthrough yet in combating global warming." Then it went on to add, "For the first time, all the countries of the world including developing ones and even a kicking and screaming United States have formally committed themselves to working out measures to tackle climate change."

The United States finally agreed to participate in "open and non-binding" talks on reducing emissions that will try to include developing countries like China and India in the process as well. The countries that already subscribe to the Kyoto Protocol (all the major industrialised countries of the world except the US and Australia) also agreed to make deeper cuts in greenhouse gas emissions over the next three years.

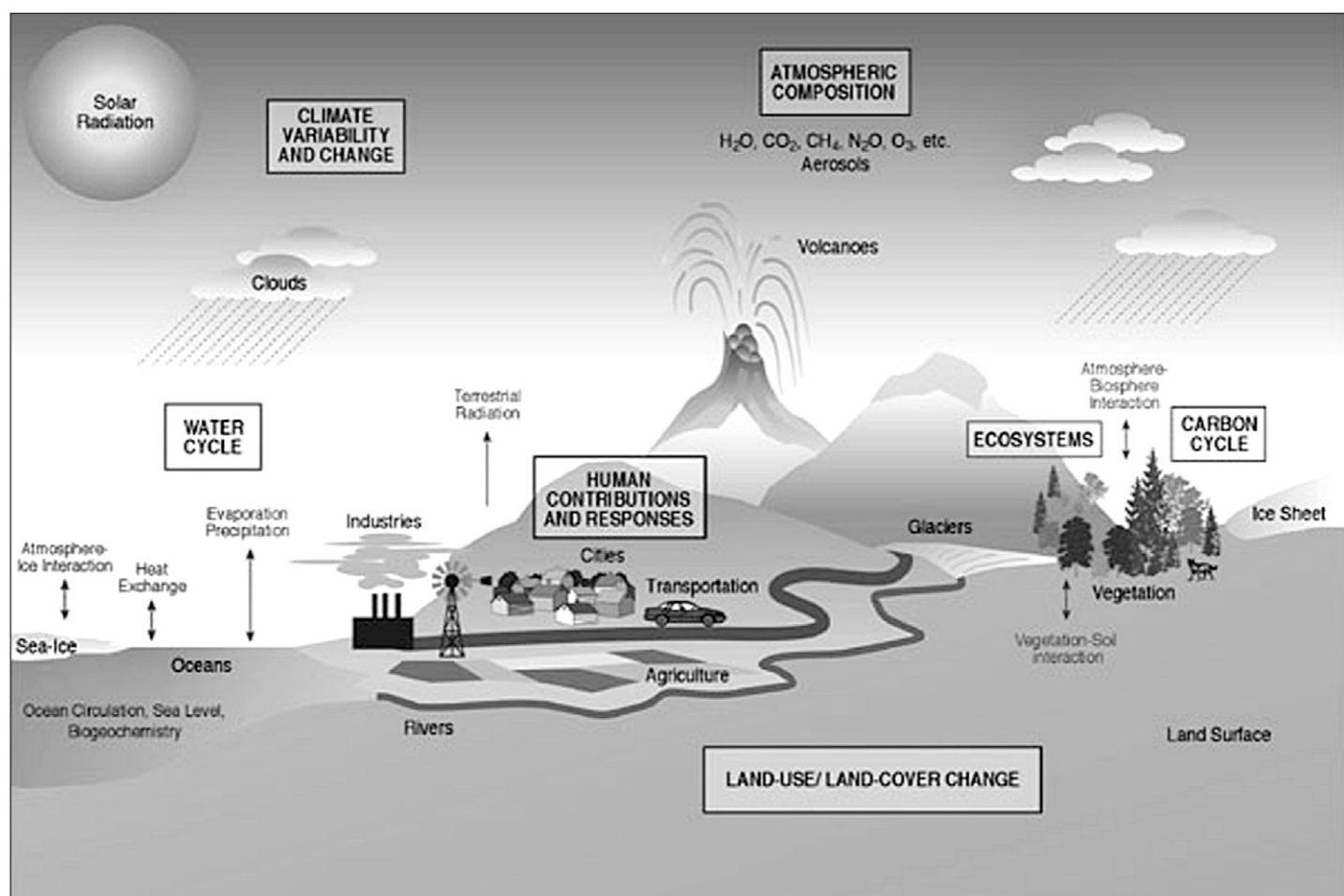
The greenhouse effect in itself is not a problem for the humanity. In fact, if the Earth's surface were not covered by a blanket of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, water vapour and a few other minor gases), life on Earth would not exist. It becomes a problem when there is a process of "accelerated warming of Earth's surface due to anthropogenic (human activity-related) releases of greenhouse gases due to industrial activity and deforestation."

This accelerated warming is also known as Global Warming. If the current trends in the emission of greenhouse gases continue, natural and agricultural ecosystems will be substantially altered. Due to the rapid melting of polar ice, sea levels will rise (coastal areas of Bangladesh and the nearby islands will disappear under water.) As we have seen this year, rising temperature of world's oceans will cause more intense hurricanes, typhoons and tropical storms. Most probably, it will also increase their frequency. It is also predicted that ocean currents of the world will change their courses, causing unpredictable climate changes in different parts of the world. Global Warming will have negative effect on human and animal health. Because of the increasing acidity of ocean waters, the fishing industries will suffer, which will reduce food supply for the humans.

Again, Bangladesh's thriving shrimp and lobster fishing industries which make significant con-

LETTER FROM EUROPE

The conference in Montreal has been successful in driving home the fact that the threat of climate change is real, indisputable, and pervasive. The organisers of the conference deserve our praises and congratulations. But the fact remains that the final agreement fell far short of expectations. Climate change is a global problem. Therefore, it has to be tackled globally. Immediate steps are required, first to put a brake on the current rate of increase, and then to reduce overall gas emissions. None of these objectives can be achieved without the active cooperation of the United States.



tributions to the country's foreign exchange reserves will dwindle. As the mountain glaciers melt and the winter snowfalls become insufficient to replenish rivers and lakes, water will become scarce, droughts will increase, and crops will fail. There will be wars among nations for the control of scarce water resources. No one should be tempted to dismiss all this as the predictions of a doom-sayer.

They are already happening in Africa, Asia, and Europe. There will, most probably, be other consequences which we cannot even imagine at this point of time. Since economic activities have brought material progress and well-being to humankind, one cannot stop them because of damages caused by greenhouse problem. Therefore, we have to find ways and means to reduce

emissions, while continuing with industrial activities. This is also true that no one nation single-handedly can do much to counteract greenhouse gas build-up in the atmosphere. The Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992 tried to address these issues. It was attended by 117 heads of state and representatives of 178 nations. Among the many treaties and

conventions that came out of the deliberations, the one that drew most attention was Framework Convention for Climate Change (also known as the Global Warming Convention). Although the treaty did not set binding targets for emission reductions of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases, the signatories agreed to reduce their emissions as a binding obligation.

A second meeting of the FCCC (Framework Convention on Climate Change) was held in Kyoto in 1997 with the objective of setting emission targets which would be binding under international law. The target set by the Kyoto Protocol for the industrialised countries was a 5.2 percent reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2012 relative to 1990. No mandatory targets were set for developing countries. The target for the EU was an 8 percent reduction, the United States 7 percent, and Japan 6 percent. In order to make the proposals more attractive to the industrialised nations, the Kyoto Protocol also introduced a curious carbon trading system.

Eight years after Kyoto, what is the situation today? 150 countries, including Russia, have ratified the treaty. Since the Protocol required ratification by countries accounting for 55 percent of global emissions to come into effect legally, Russia's ratification last year was a very important step in the right direction. It finally came into effect on February 16, 2005. The United States, which happens to be the world's worst polluter (more than 25 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions) and its ally Australia have refused to sign it on the excuse that it will hurt their economies. The developing countries do not have targets in spite of the fact that China and India are emitting more and more greenhouse gases because of their rapid industrialisation. The EU as an economic region has reduced its total emissions slightly. Germany and the U.K have so far been successful in reducing their emissions by 18.2 percent and 13 percent respectively. Unfortunately Spain, instead of reducing its emissions, increased them by 45 percent in 2004. This increase may even reach 50 percent by the end of the year 2005. But even with Kyoto in place, it seems that if the current rate of increase continues, global emissions will increase by 50 percent between now and 2030 because of the reasons explained above.

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Although the Bush administration, after last-minute brinkmanship gave its lukewarm support to non-binding talks on emission control, the fact remains that it has not shown any signs to indicate that it appreciates the gravity of the situation. According to the Press of Christchurch, New Zealand: "The United States under President George W. Bush, although apparently changing its position slightly, is still miles away from signing up to the assumptions and requirements of the Protocol."

So what is required on the part of the US is its full and enthusiastic commitment to the cause. Once America joins the battle wholeheartedly, Australia, which is now following a policy of wait and see, will come on board. India, China and Brazil will lose their excuses for not giving their full support to emission control. It would then be easier for the United Nations to draw up a global long-term plan for emission control covering highly technical subjects like non-polluting energy sources, methane management, renewable energy, carbon sequestration and reforestation.

But the sad truth is, without the active cooperation of the world's most powerful nation and at the same time its worst polluter, it will be impossible to implement any plan, however good or comprehensive it may be. Now the question is: Will this great nation rise to the occasion?