

## Netting the corrupt

The operation must continue

THE public reaction to the arrests of the prominent figures belonging to various groups including the two major political parties says all about the rightfulness of the attempt by the caretaker government to rid the country of the bad. Public reaction has been positive. All those that would like to see our country cleansed of the corrupt have welcomed it.

Although we are not aware as yet of the specific charges against the arrested persons, their antecedents suggest that their misuse and abuse of position and political link to feather their own nest to the detriment of the state's interest have had much to do with it. Some are also alleged to have links with the Islamic extremists.

We appreciate the government action and would like to see it continue till those that have exploited the resources of the state at the expense of this poor nation have been netted and brought to justice. We feel that arrest is less than half the job done. It is important that not only are charges framed without delay, it must also be made public and the arrested persons also be afforded all the due process of law.

While we would like to see that they are brought to justice quickly, speedy trial must not circumvent the existing legal process. We want that process to be speeded up. While many of the arrested political leaders had, when they had their say, shown scant respect for the rule of law and the legal system, we must commit ourselves to shun that path and, by recourse to a open and transparent legal procedure, reestablish the rule of law that was so badly denuded of both its substance and essence, particularly over the last five years.

It must be remembered too that the success of the current government to rid the country of the corrupt depend on how successful it is in demolishing the possibility of future nexus between the corrupt politicians, businessmen and the bureaucrats. And that will depend on how effectively those arrested upto now, and will be soon, are brought to book. We understand too that cleansing our system that is so inexorably mired in corruption is perhaps a very tall order for this government. It is a good start. And it will suffice if we can send the correct message to the dishonest, corrupt and the shady, that their errant ways may be of benefit to them but only temporarily, and that they would have to face justice and made to account for their misdeed ultimately.

## Olive branch to Democrats

Bush's deepening misery over Iraq

NOTHING can be more uncomfortable for an American president than turning into a lame duck. But that again is what all presidents lucky enough to be elected to a second term have experienced, of course to their dismay. American citizens have looked upon a second-term occupant of the White House as a man in patient wait for retirement. At the same time, politicians have focused on the future, some through a honing of their own skills for probable presidential leadership. It is this latter bit which is on display in Washington these days. With the likes of Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John McCain and John Edwards eyeing the White House in a post-Bush period, it is fairly understandable why George W. Bush should be feeling rather lonely these days.

There are other reasons for Mr. Bush to be lonely. His policy in Iraq has about collapsed; and with more than 3,000 US soldiers dead in an insurgency the administration neither foresaw nor expected, the twilight for the president appears to be descending sooner than expected. With both houses of Congress in the control of Democrats, he has been forced into holding out an olive branch to those who have been opposing his conduct of the war. Fundamentally, the olive branch is a plea for bipartisan support over Iraq. But the spirit of bipartisanship has already run into trouble over the administration's plan to add 21,000 more troops to the already existing 132,000 in Iraq. Not even Mr. Bush's fellow Republicans -- and they include such vocal senators as Chuck Hagel -- are willing to strengthen his hands. Mr. Hagel keeps drawing attention to the futility of the war he fought in Vietnam. Iraq, he reasons, cannot be any different. And then there are the Democrats, nearly all of whom are leaping across one another to offer ways out of the crisis. They think they can ensure a recapture of the presidential office in 2008 by endlessly talking about the mess President Bush has created.

Mr. Bush once called himself the decider of policy. Now a fellow Republican, Senator Arlen Specter, has told him he is not the sole decider. Misery cannot go any deeper.

## People hate free-market policies



PRAFUL BIDWAI

writes from New Delhi

As many as 52 percent believe that the rich have gained the most from neo-liberal policies. Only 31 percent expect India's economic situation to improve in the next six months. Thirty-nine percent don't believe that the UPA has successfully implemented the National Common Minimum Program. This shows a huge disconnect between official policies and public perceptions. The UPA will be sleepwalking into disaster if it fails to correct course.

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## The caretaker government: To be or not to be

Bangladesh's image will also have improved dramatically while economic gains will have been strengthened and properly distributed. Many believe that now is that window of opportunity and that "haste will make waste." Hence, the current CG ought to be given time, space, resources and flexibility to straighten out the wrinkles, although their actions, too, ought to be carefully and closely watched.

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

THE writing on the wall is plain and simple: The caretaker government must stay on. That is the people's mandate -- surely that is democracy! The exhortations of people from several quarters to quickly announce a firm date for the elections seem to be the machinations of vested quarters to return quickly to the status quo.

I do not detect any such demands from the grassroots. I might even venture to hypothesize that the electorate is in no hurry for an election right now. A referendum could easily (dis)prove my hypothesis. Alternatively, some scientific polling may be in order to check the nation's mood on the matter.

From what I gather, the toiling, alienated, impoverished, terrorized and seemingly enslaved people of the land are interested, first and foremost, in a caretaker government (CG) that would bring about a wholesale cleanup of rampant corruption, ensure a safe and secure environment (witness the city of grills and night-guards), and introduce appropriate changes in governance structures and processes that would enable the people to choose their "true" representatives.

Human failures, and the concomitant corruption, are at the core of Bangladesh's sorry state of governance. Multiple parties have been afflicted by this malignant ailment over the years, three being most prominent among them.

First, there are those self-

Attributes	Politicians (n=434)	Bureaucrats (n=405)	Business/Industrialists (n=405)
Sincere	3.36	4.07	4.67
Competent	3.44	4.90	5.11
Selfish	7.03	5.94	6.85
Arrogant	5.56	5.37	5.66
Patriotic	3.61	4.22	3.85
Honest	2.60	3.36	3.21
Trustworthy	2.91	3.88	4.00

indulgent, insincere, and egomaniacal politicians who have usurped their ill-begotten riches.

An opinion poll I conducted about ten years ago in two phases in Dhaka city gives a rough flavour of how people view these three classes of people. I doubt if things have changed for the better.

The ratings on a scale of 1-10 (not 0-10) are certainly not anything to gloat about. Given these enduring and sticky perceptions, what is the prognosis for immediate election? Would it not merely reinstate most of the same players, and return the nation to the same yoke and misery?

The problem of human failures (aka "opportunism" in the academic world) is a basic obstacle to the country's progress, requiring immediate and undivided attention. This problem is neither new, nor is it emblematic of Bangladesh alone, and must be understood in its fundamental context. Research in the areas of agency theory and transaction costs economics has led to Nobel prizes for elegant analyses of this problem.

Similarly, political scientists have dealt with the concept of legitimacy, i.e. how governments

win and lose their claims of rectitude and moral authority, while sociologists have coined the notion of social capital that emphasizes the need for trust and cooperation within communities to achieve collective goals. Incidentally, it has been empirically shown that nations with higher social capital are more economically advanced. What is most important is to recognize the fundamental deficiency -- human failures -- that Bangladesh faces in terms of the country's governance.

Evidence abounds in many countries that human failures can be managed. At this point in time, whether Bangladesh faces a constitutional conundrum, whether elections must be held within X number of days, whether ballot boxes ought to be transparent, whether an unblemished voter list can be prepared, or whether ID cards should be issued represent peripheral issues -- although they ought to be in our purview.

What is more important, and substantive is that an opportunity has opened up in Bangladesh for managing human failures, that would better guarantee the people the basics of sustenance (food, health care, education), a safe and secure environment, the options to pursue opportunities of their choice, and enjoy conditions to live with dignity and self-respect while enhancing their self-worth.

Who can bring about this change effectively and expeditiously? If a CG can detach itself from party affiliation, establish and communicate clear and measurable goals, involve society's jewels (not the fake ones), work methodically, take bold steps, and guide the nation with a steady hand to bring about fundamental reforms that past politicians have ignored, or not bothered to comprehend, for



lack of desire and/or ability, it will have left behind a stable and enduring polity before handing it back to the "right" band of people's representatives via elections.

Bangladesh's image will also have improved dramatically while economic gains will have been strengthened and properly distributed. Many believe that now is that window of opportunity and that "haste will make waste." Hence, the current CG

ought to be given time, space, resources and flexibility to straighten out the wrinkles, although their actions, too, ought to be carefully and closely watched.

This should keep the CG focused and on track. It is also likely to keep them honest ... lest human failures begin to creep in amongst the entrusted team!

The writer is at the Black School of Business at Penn State Erie.

## A humble submission to the leaders of the two main political alliances

Time is fast running out. You simply have to mend your ways or else matters are bound to slip out of your hands. This is the turning point of your existence. There have to be major tactical changes in your politics. You must shun the path of militancy, hatred, and anger, and reject the path of retaliatory politics.

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

OME people are debating over the nature of the present caretaker government. How long is it going to stay? Some have even described it as more of an interim government than a caretaker government.

All of you also expressed your desire to see the present caretaker government quit and hand over power to an elected government soon. You have made guarded remarks while welcoming the present caretaker government.

But, above everything else, what I find missing here is the explicit admission of the mistakes made by all of you that have largely contributed to the coming of the emergency now prevailing in the country.

Now that there is a lull in your "activities," it is time to ponder upon, and make an analytical review of, the mistakes you have made in the past. Despite the

fact that you may argue that many of the moves now being taken for restructuring and revitalizing the various key organizations/institutions are the result of your recently launched movements for restoration of "people's rights," at the same time it will not be incorrect to say that the so called struggle or movement, has also snatched away peoples rights. It has, at the same time, put in jeopardy the healthy trend in the growth of our economy not to speak of the very image of the country.

I believe that it is now high time that you and I think seriously, and carefully chalk out a plan for stopping this curse of politicizing of not only the civil administration but also the society at large. In democracy it is bad practice to adopt the policy of "divide and rule," or rule by default. Failure to do this will bring about disastrous consequences for the nation at large.

It is them, and their gleaming faces that you get to see in both our electronic and the print media. Do you realize why this has happened? It is simply the result of your collective failures. It is because of you that these people, who are non-entities in their own countries, are having a field day at our expense.

We are already faced with that possibility. After all, in time to come it is you who will be entrusted with the responsibility of administering the country.

I have this feeling that your recent behaviour has also overtly hurt the very self-esteem and dignity of this nation. Just consider this, today more than ever before, we are beholden to a select number of representatives of some powerful countries of the West including some international donor organizations.

The entire nation, in a way, is held hostage by them. Today, it is they who are calling the shots. Today, it is they who are giving us our daily lessons in democracy and democratic norms. It is they who are telling us as to how to hold free and fair elections, and it is they who are telling us to do this and that or else face consequences.

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Much time has been lost in arguing and fixing blame on each other with regard to who is doing what to whom in connection with containing and arresting the spread of the ugly curse of religious terrorism in the country.

We can no longer sit back and indulge in the empty rhetoric of how moderate we are in our beliefs as a state in which the majority are Muslims. Indeed, you need to go for a serious soul searching in this regard, more so the oldest and the most experienced party of them all.

This aspect alone has the potential for making or breaking this nation. Someone the other day told me that at a time when the rest of the world is traveling to the moon we are still living in the world of fatwa.

You must simply devise ways and means to keep politics away from religion. Stop using and abusing religion to meet your selfish political goals, or else you will sink along with the nation.

I also have this feeling that you seriously lack in vision and have this tendency of living in the past. The past is important, but cannot be the all encompassing factor in shaping our

present or the future. Our glorious history alone shall not take the country forward, we must also work, and work hard now, in the living present.

You have turned politics into a profitable business enterprise, rather than a vehicle for protecting, serving and working for the welfare of the people. You have continually, for years, made fools of the people and misled them.

Most of you, particularly the leaders of your parties, live a life of affluence and luxury. It is because of you that many innocent lives have been lost and families ruined. When Nobel laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus called you "corrupt," and instruments for money making, I am afraid he is not far from the truth.

Time is fast running out. You simply have to mend your ways or else matters are bound to slip out of your hands. This is the turning point of your existence. There have to be major tactical changes in your politics. You must shun the path of militancy, hatred, and anger, and reject the path of retaliatory politics.

Shamsher Chowdhury is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

rich to be taxed more "to help the poor." The sole exception to this are the urban rich.

The latest "India Today-AC Nielsen-ORG-MARG" poll (February 5) confirms the same trends as the CSDS. The Indian public's greatest worries are rising prices (39 percent) and unemployment (33 percent).

As many as 52 percent believe that the rich have gained the most from neo-liberal policies. Only 31 percent expect India's economic situation to improve in the next six months. Thirty-nine percent don't believe that the UPA has successfully implemented the National Common Minimum Program.

This shows a huge disconnect between official policies and public perceptions. The UPA will be sleepwalking into disaster if it fails to correct course.

Such correction can be neither superficial nor a mere public relations apology for neo-liberalism. What's needed is honest appraisal of policy flaws -- and a radical change of direction.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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It also means, as it did last fortnight, ignoring signs of a slowdown in the world economy.

In recent years, globalisation has drawn sharp criticism for promoting skewed growth and widening rich-poor disparities. But Indian finance ministers and senior officials unfailingly appear at Davos to convince CEOs that "emerging superpower" India remains dedicated to free-market "reforms."

The UPA is pursuing policies which run against the expectations raised by the 2004 elections that brought it to power.

The election results were a powerful rejection of the Bharatiya Janata Party's neo-liberal "India Shining" campaign. Dr Manmohan Singh recognised this and promised inclusive growth.

They reassured corporations that India is ready to receive \$150 billion over five years to build its infrastructure; as a

reform.

As many as 72 percent are not even aware of the policy changes made since 1991 in agriculture, industry, finance, disinvestment, etc according to a Hindustan Times-CNN-IBN survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, based on a