

Army's role

CAS's remarks clear the air

THE categorical remarks of the Army chief will, we are sure, clear the misgiving, if there was any, about the possibility of the army taking over the reins of power in Bangladesh. He has been very forthright in his remarks, which will put to rest any speculation about direct intervention of the military in the affairs of the state. A very clear picture in this matter has emerged from his comments that we all must welcome as boding well for the country.

Given the experience of the country since its inception, the seminal period of the nation had seen military interventions as a consequence of the flux in politics and the cleavages in our society in general. The experience has not been very happy, neither for the country nor for the armed forces. It was therefore not very unnatural if certain quarters had harboured some anxiety whether the armed forces would emerge as 'saviours' of the nation once again, at the time of political uncertainty. We are sure that the attitude of the military on the political issues of the country and the current dispensation of the armed forces are very different from what had been in the seventies and eighties. The remarks have confirmed our belief that the armed forces have neither the willingness nor the proclivity to take up the reins of power in Bangladesh.

We, therefore, feel that to even contemplate a military intervention in Bangladesh is an odious exercise given the very positive role that the armed forces had played since the restoration of democracy in 1991. One must concede unhesitatingly that since the early nineties on two very critical and uncertain occasions the armed forces role had helped in restoring democracy in the country, and, in the very recent instance, it had prevented the collapse of constitutional process and the political structure in Bangladesh.

We have no doubt that in the current context, and also in the future, the armed forces will continue to play its primary role with its main obligation to the constitutional authority at the helm of affairs, and remain fully committed to the constitution in helping the government of the day to tide over any temporary crisis.

Highly irregular

Clean up operation welcome

MONG the good deeds accomplished by the caretaker government so far, the decision to cancel a selection of 757 police sub-inspectors and sergeants for appointment by the immediate past 4-party alliance government violating all the rules and regulations deserves special mention. The departmental decision came after a thorough investigation was conducted into the circumstances under which the recruitment was processed.

The corruption included bribery and partisan consideration in selecting the candidates reflecting the magnitude of irregularities the past government indulged in during its tenure. There are allegations that the money had gone to many high and mighty.

The police department has been the worst victim as far as politicisation was concerned during the erstwhile alliance government. Incompetent men and women belonging to the party cadre were promoted to senior positions on condition of serving the interest of the political people in power.

Today it is not surprising that resentment can be discerned in the voices of some senior police officials demanding removal of such officers who have been given undue promotion and posting by the last regime in power. As a result, in the last five years, policemen were mostly kept busy protecting the interest of the political people. It is only obvious that such interference in departmental laws and regulations has gravely weakened the police department.

We strongly feel that mere departmental enquiry will not stem the rot in the police department since recruitments were usually done on partisan consideration rather than merit by the government of the day which has largely affected professionalism in the police department. Therefore, what is needed is a national judicial enquiry to get to the bottom of the recruitment and other corruption and expose those who had benefited from the illegal and immoral deals.

V by the vanquished?

Time to socially ostracize those smiling dons



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

The very recent display of the historic V sign, that we watched in suspended hilarity, came from some teltete raghab boal (big fish) of this country. They flashed the sign when being taken to the jail by the police. Why did they do it? Was that supposed to mean a victory of sorts? Did they come out victorious in a battle? Did they achieve something worth achieving? Something like winning the Nobel Peace Prize? Quite uncanny, isn't it?

in his car.

FORMING a V sign with the forefinger and middle finger used to be the trademark idiosyncrasy of Winston Churchill, the WW-II prime minister of England.

The

sign meant Victory. It was an optimistic and confident sign to indicate that he was winning in the battlefields, and also in the political battles fought in parliament.

It was an audacious sign that decoded the message that he was on top of things.

In fact, Churchill's wily smile, the cigar in the corner of his mouth, and the V sign, created an intimidating specter that the Nazis abhorred as long as they lasted in history.

Whenever mobbed, Churchill used to thrust his iconic sign at the cameras of the newsmen waiting in the freezing cold outside 10 Downing Street, and speed away

hailed away in police vans on

charges of theft, robbery or corruption. Worse...they even show it when given death sentence by a court!

You don't believe this? Please look at the photographs in newspapers, or at TV footages, of criminals flashing the V sign after receiving death sentence! It beats me!

What is there to be so happy about getting your neck stretched permanently!

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Did they achieve something worth achieving? Something like winning the Nobel Peace Prize? Quite uncanny, isn't it?

After the V sign came the million-dollar smile from the arrested lot of raghab boals. They looked at the prying cameras and gave their best shot for the record.

They looked so happy to have been arrested by the joint forces and taken to prison! They were ecstatic at being caught after a brief game of hide and seek; hence they offered their expensive smiles.

And people wondered whether they should also smile, and if they do so then whether they should smile with them or at them.

Weren't the V signs and smiles offered in arrogant defiance and disregard of the law and authority? Didn't such body language

explicitly and unambiguously indicate that those people possessed a kind of couldn't-care-less attitude as far as people's reaction was concerned?

They smiled because they knew they could afford to smile. They smiled because they had bought the smile paying a very high price, so they are not ready yet to let go of it.

Can you socially ostracize these smiling dons?

And to think how, all these years, most of the civil society members frantically tried their utmost to have those "Rags-to-Riches VIPs" (Viciously Intimidating People) grace the wedding ceremonies of their sons and daughters!

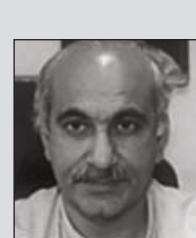
Should we sit for a job before those who destroyed our sons' academic careers?

Well, it's reckoning time. The moral fiber of society is in tatters, and it's all because of those V-sign flashing, smiling dons.

Therefore, let us decide what we should do and what we should not. A lot of the people today think that it is time to socially ostracize these people who have polluted every nook and cranny of this country -- the country we metaphorically call Golden Bengal.

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Nuclear poker face-off



MJ AKBAR

BYLINE

Nuclear poker requires nerves of uranium, and no one is certain about the strength of any player's cards. Everyone knows that Iran does not have nuclear weapons yet, but that is not the question. Has the facility at Natanz already crossed the point where its destruction would trigger damage in excess of Chernobyl, at the very least? If not, will that point be crossed by October? Ergo, if there is to be a military solution then it must be before the end of this summer.

THE alter ego of a boom, I suppose, is doom. Failure does not have too much to worry about, but success has a great deal to lose. You can't lose; can you, if you have nothing to lose?

There have been few contemporary success stories quite as dramatic as Dubai. Five decades ago it was not even on the urban map of the world, not much more than an antiquated port with a blind eye, the only address on a beachhead that survived because of international indifference. It did not even have a port of oil. It still does not.

Today, its skyscrapers shimmer like an Arabian Nights miracle. If traffic jams are a modern metaphor for urban growth, then Dubai can put in a bid for a place in Guinness.

From seven in the morning till past ten at night, a curve of tail-to-tail or head to head snake of blinking cars snakes along the hidden tarmac. In a remarkable display of imagination, the rulers of this small principality have converted a strip of sand along an uncertain ocean into a business-cum-shopping-cum-holiday haven.

No one has any real idea of what the radioactive fallout would be for Iran and its surrounding region. Central Asian nations do not have a clue of the collateral damage their children might suffer, and for how long. Gulf states have further concerns.

The Americans do not have the

infantry for a follow-up regime change even if the assault was perfectly successful. So the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would remain in power, at the heart of a polity created by the late Imam Ruhollah Khomeini.

It does not need much imagination to foresee that Iran would target western business interests, which are strewn within reach from Dubai to Doha, in retaliation.

It has taken a remarkable generation to create Dubai. More than glass and concrete, Dubai is a rare symbol of confidence in what was once dismissed as the Third World.

What happens to the interests of Bush's friends in oil and industry if Dubai's durability and stability is corroded? What happens to oil and energy in the region if it is affected by radioactivity?

Planners in Pentagon, the White House and Tel Aviv might believe that they have done their studies and that the consequences are under control, or that the damage will be within acceptable limits, whatever that means.

These are largely the same people who wrote fantasy scripts about flower-strewn streets in Baghdad lined by cheering crowds, as George Bush was

honoured by a ticker tape parade along the Tigris.

The track record, to put it mildly, is not encouraging.

Nuclear poker requires nerves of uranium, and no one is certain about the strength of any player's cards.

Everyone knows that Iran does not have nuclear weapons yet, but that is not the question. Has the facility at Natanz already crossed the point where its destruction would trigger damage in excess of Chernobyl, at the very least?

If not, will that point be crossed by October? Ergo, if there is to be a military solution then it must be before the end of this summer.

There is some comfort in the fact that Iran has moved away from unambiguous belligerence towards more nuanced diplomacy.

At Davos in January, former president Muhammad Khatami discussed a scheme with American and European delegates to this economic love fest, in which Iran would suspend enrichment of uranium for six months.

This period would be used by a group, consisting of members of the Security Council plus Germany and India, to inspect and

assess Iran's nuclear program and report back to the United Nations.

In a related gesture, Iran did not vote against a UN General Assembly resolution condemning denial of the Holocaust that Hitler perpetrated during the Second World War.

In Iran, senior clerics have condemned, publicly, uninhibited adventurism in policy, referring clearly to Ahmadinejad.

Is this good-cop-bad-cop strategy? Is Iran merely buying time, and if so, how much time? Another Security Council resolution is due in March. America will obviously seek to phrase this resolution in terms that make it a virtual authorization for war if Washington chooses to go to war.

Does Iran want to thwart it or dilute it without giving much in return? Is Iran waiting for winter, when the American presidential campaign season will make Bush hostage to domestic politics?

Everyone has the same list of questions. I suspect you might not find firm answers even in Tehran. It might be more relevant to apply a general principle while the players sit at the nuclear poker table, their cards clutched against their breasts, their teeth clenched.

Nations might, in certain conditions, be martial or hegemonic, but they are rarely suicidal. Grievous mistakes, exacting a colossal price, are made, but not out of intent. If Germany in 1914 had known the impossible cost of war, and the certainty of defeat, would she have commenced hostilities in the First World War?

If Bush had known what he knows now about the consequences of invading Iraq, would

he have dared launch his "shock and awe" campaign?

The answer in both cases is a clear no. The only thing certain about nuclear poker is that if there is a confrontation, there are no winners.

It was surely this thought that prompted Jacques Chirac to muse before reporters in Paris recently that it did not much matter whether Iran had a nuclear weapon or two, for if it ever dared use them it would be obliterated. (There was a meaningless retraction of this statement later.)

Pranab Mukherjee has just returned to Delhi from Tehran. He cannot be much wiser than he was before he left, because the answers to the difficult questions fluctuate with every changing shadow on any player's face.

What Mr Mukherjee did, with the confidence of a veteran, was to underscore the maturity of India's presence at the table.

India is a legitimate nuclear and economic power, and possibly a role model for Iran even if India may have no wish for such a honour.

But India has a stake in the outcome of the game, and it is in its immediate interest that tensions be calibrated downwards.

Apart from other consequences, a military confrontation would implode the world economy just when one section of India is rising from the economic atmosphere into the stratosphere.

After all, just one alphabet makes the difference between boom and doom.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

The magnificent eleven



ABDULLAH A DEWAN

NO NONSENSE

The rule of "the magnificent eleven" will end after the next national election. The transition from their brief governance to the rule by familiar political faces may beget an uneasy hopefulness amongst the people. The nation has to be assured that the next political party coming to power will follow the model of the current CTG. That process may have already started with the support for, and sanctification of, their performances by recognized politicians, the media and the people on the streets and farmlands.

people while the former have tacitly acquiesced, or ignored, in helplessness.

Over the last five years, the political bandits have plunged themselves into an extravaganza of greed and thievery, and disregarded the possibility of paybacks in shame and shackles.

They thought that the politicized network they had implanted in every branch of the government would ensure their return to power, and protect their looted wealth forever.

When the people lose their trust and confidence in the political process and politicians of the country, and hopelessness besieges them, the emergence of a new face to restore that trust becomes indispensable.

Just when the common citizens had virtually no alternative a state

of emergency was declared, with a caretaker government comprised of eleven distinguished citizens.

After watching their modus operandi, I have taken to calling them "the magnificent eleven" -- homage to the original "magnificent seven." They could also be called the "dream team" of good governance.

Given the extent and speed of reformation of institutions and the overhauling of the administration, the politicians who will be coming to power next won't have much reform to undertake.

Instead, they will be commissioned to initiate and maintain the momentum of good governance. However, the people will guard against the politicians' relapsing into the kind of sordid and corrupt politics to which we've become so accustomed.

Now that everything is falling in

line with the criterion of good governance, everyone is advancing a wish list for the CTG to implement.

Even Sheikh Hasina made her wishes known on February 7. In a press statement Hasina pleaded:

"We want to firmly ask the caretaker government to take account of the wealth of those who were in power in the last 25 years, not only the last 5 or 10 years. Let all cases of corruption be properly investigated to bring the accused to book."

Great wishes indeed, notwithstanding her own failure to purge her party of corruption both during her tenure of office and after.

While our wishes, and those of Hasina's, are being fulfilled by the CTG, I have, nonetheless, written the following wish list for Sheikh Hasina to consider:

Do not derail the mission of the "magnificent eleven" by exerting pressure for early election;

Wipe out the corrupt and the criminal from the party before the reconstituted ACC books them;

Nominate only the honest, competent and qualified candidates for the upcoming MP election;

Help restore the academic atmosphere by reducing patronization of student politics;

Include at least three of the

magnificent eleven in your next cabinet for continuity of the reform process, and gaining people's confidence in your government, if your party is elected to power.

Disband the 5 point memorandum of agreement with Khilafat Majlis;

Work for the people and take the last opportunity to build your legacy.

The delivery of political goods is central to the formation of a collective faith in the virtues of democracy.

Citizens form opinions about politicians' performance in implementing public policies (to create jobs, control inflation, and distribute incomes), and subsequently judge whether democracy is