

Drive against corruption

Should be focused leaving no room for ambiguity

We not only endorse but also appreciate the main thrust and objective of the caretaker government's drive against corruption, which has already shaken some seemingly unassailable 'fortresses' of corruption. Who would have thought that the immediate past prime minister's sons would be arrested for their alleged involvement in corrupt practices? The drive has cut across party lines and reached the very top of the political hierarchy. One thing is pretty clear: no political party would have been able to take such a bold step to combat corruption.

From the same point of view of wanting the drive to succeed, we would like to point out that the charges that are being brought against the arrestees are not always the most credible. The latest case in point is the arrest of BNP leader Moudud Ahmed for his possession of liquor that was allegedly imported without paying the duty. Another development that is noteworthy is that the Law Adviser himself termed the extortion case against one-time prime minister Sheikh Hasina as being 'peculiar'. There shouldn't be any ambiguity in the charges being pressed.

Of course there is little doubt that those who are corrupt in the public eye have been netted, regardless of their political affiliations. But after they have spent more than a month in jail, we feel constrained to say that people may have questions about the speed and seriousness with which most of the cases are being handled. Why can't the government reveal the full extent of the crimes allegedly committed by the detained politicians? Without this kind of clarity in the actions of the government, doubts may creep in about the credibility of the process.

While we are supportive of the general drive against corruption, we would like to raise two points here. First, in an expanding economy there are small and medium enterprises which sometimes do things that by technical interpretations may fall on the wrong side of the law. Their such omissions and commissions may be seen from a different angle of flexibility. Secondly, there is a widespread lack of awareness, especially of income tax laws; this should also be shown some sensitivity.

Militants regrouping?

Crush the networks once and for all

We are heartened by the success of the law enforcing agencies in smoking out militants from different parts of the country. But the question is why they are still springing out from different directions?

The government has, of course, made it clear that it meant business when it came to apprehending those who took the liberty to misinterpret and misuse religion to fulfill their obscurantist objectives. Hopefully, the ongoing drive to keep the misguided young people on the chase would help in the long run in obliterating their networks now seemingly spread all across the country.

The factor of religious extremism found a new dimension during the rule of the 4-party alliance government when many of the former lawmakers allegedly had directly and indirectly provided support to some of the groups, particularly JMB and Harkatul Islam. It was JMB that had flourished under the patronage of the powerful godfathers and became blatantly reckless to say the minimum. It is good to note that the government is also looking into the allegations of involvement of the former lawmakers in the rise of the militant groups.

It seems the threat of this dangerously armed outfit has not been totally neutralised with the hanging of their six top leaders. The second rung leaders are still at large and they are audacious enough to regroup at various secret hideouts and intimidate people with threatening letters. It is a cause for concern that the militants continue to recruit and train young people, distribute books and leaflets containing messages of 'jihad' with renewed vigour and zeal.

We feel the added concern is the surfacing of some old groups of militants across the country under various new names and labels. This is a new tactic the law enforcing agencies must try to deal with an iron hand. To achieve desired results, law enforcers will have to track down the mentors, funding sources and training grounds to crush the networks once and for all. It is an ongoing effort but, nevertheless, it cannot go on ad infinitum. The sooner it is done the better.

IN FRONT OF THE BOX

No smile this time

PAUL MASON

HERE will be much talk of the "luck of the Irish" in papers around the world today -- but these are the ones that cliché is out of place here. There was no providence stung. Here was a involved in how good chance for the Ireland went about the Tigers to put some real distance between Bangladesh. The Irish themselves and the were well prepared, ICC Associates, and took calculated risks, build on their heroics kept their nerve, and against India and outplayed the Tigers and South Africa. Instead for a 74 run win. For they capitulated, and the first time in this wiped the smile off my World Cup, I was disappointed by Bangladesh was thrown off from the

start by Johnston's brave decision to bat first on a tricky wicket - a first taste of some inspired captaincy. He wasn't about to let Bangladesh's spinners choke his batsmen later in the day when conditions would suit them. That he cleaned his bowlers his opposite number to wrap up the game summarised Johnston's day. He led from the front with both the bat and ball, and his bowling changes did not let the tempo drop -- bringing about some vital wickets. His "funky chicken" wasn't

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The speculations galore



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

If we have to revert back to democracy, political parties are important institutions. But they do not grow overnight. Even if stigmatised now, the Awami League spearheaded the country's fight for independence and has its own symbolic value.

put back on track and reforms initiated on multiple fronts. The perpetrators of macro-corruption, criminalisation and terror tactics in politics, and myriad other evil practices, have been rounded up and brought before the law. No political dispensation would have been able to do it, for obvious reasons, and the present government justifiably received widespread public support and applause on this count.

Indeed, the credit goes to the interim government for its hunky-dory performance, which could still be better but for perfidious politics pursued during the preceding

years. There are roadblocks at almost every step, and going forward will be painfully slow. Even if the public is generous enough to give the time needed by the government for removing the debris of the past, there are demands for a time-frame for the election of the ninth parliament, as well as for limited political activity.

Understandably, as the government couldn't immediately do it for undisclosed reasons, the inability resulted in wild speculation, and even scepticism among the political class. It is to the credit of the CA, who intuitively sensed the impatience, that he put it to rest by

removing the shroud of ambivalence that surrounded the issue of election. The CA has, in unequivocal terms, assured that it would be held before the year 2008 was out.

Speculation is rife about the future political order, existing political parties and their leadership. The recent developments with regard to the top leadership of those parties sparked a new spate of debate in political circles. Even private conversations revolve around the same topic.

In recent times, there have been numerous accusations against politics and politicians. This is not without reason. In the wake of

military and quasi-military rules in the country pseudo politicians infiltrated the ranks of genuine politicians, bringing bad name to politics. Many of them were amoral and opportunistic.

There is nothing like absolutely good or bad in any field. Even the great statesmen in history are not without their share of failure and stigma. The interim government has already undertaken draconian anti-corruption steps, and many have been caught in its dragnet.

Let them face the verdict of the law of the land. Let the ill-gotten wealth and money laundered away by political thugs be retrieved and utilised in a constructive and philanthropic ways, as suggested by the army chief in one of his addressees.

If we have to revert back to democracy, political parties are important institutions. But they do not grow overnight. Even if stigmatised now, the Awami League

spearheaded the country's fight for independence and has its own symbolic value.

The BNP also served the cause of democracy -- in spite of its enormous failures. Yet, there can be a third force. A new political platform of "clean" people, but not at the cost of the existing political parties, as is rumoured.

The existing politics ought not be tampered with. Because that will only breed a bunch of new opportunists, beneficiaries of a new situation, and bandwagonists. They will certainly not serve the noble purpose envisioned by the reformists.

What is, however, imperative is that the political parties should, on their own, introduce a measure of democracy within themselves. It is immaterial where Sheikh Hasina or Begum Zia find their place in that process.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

A nation in crisis

IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

AAEM Bokhari's open letter to the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan was appalling for several reasons. Firstly, it tarnished the image of a man for whom one has great respect, Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, and secondly, it came from the pen of another man for whom one has great respect.

If the facts stated therein are true, then the letter needed to be written; it should not have been made public. "Excesses" as per Naeem's letter are commonplace in Pakistan, bringing it to the public domain demeans an office one should always hold sacred, as much as anything can be held sacred in a fair and positive manner.

Most impressive in raising the stature of the Bench, the Honourable CJ's integrity and character have never been questioned.

Triggering an unfortunate sequence of events, which for a time spun out of control, the letter had a

backlash of sorts. It enhanced the stature of the man, which the letter sought to demean, and tarnished the image of the letter writer, bringing him down many rungs from the pedestal he rightly should be on. Naeem Bokhari has class, he is no ordinary being, and the letter has made him look like an ordinary mortal.

When senior judges of the higher courts are sitting in judgment on

their brother colleague, one should not comment, both justice and common sense will certainly prevail. Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry's period as chief justice was exciting because of his activist role in pursuing cases of public consequence in a fair and positive manner. Most impressive in raising the stature of the Bench, the Honourable CJ's integrity and character have never been questioned.

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