

Terrible traffic congestion

Address the issue on priority basis

TRAFFIC congestion, which has always been a problem of highly intractable nature, is now threatening to almost paralyse life in the city. That is what the citizens have experienced in the last three days, as the main thoroughfares remain clogged for hours together with long queues of transports of various modes, greatly restricting the mobility of commuters.

Lack of efficiency and accountability of the agencies in charge of maintaining the roads and controlling traffic is the main reason behind the ever-worsening traffic situation, but there seems to be nobody to shoulder the responsibility. While the Dhaka City Corporation puts the blame on poor traffic management, the traffic managers themselves point to a host of limitations they have. We believe the defensive arguments that these agencies often resort to might have a grain of truth in them, but the greater truth is that the absence of coordination and sound planning continues to aggravate the traffic problem. Even the government's 20-year-long Strategic Transport Plan for the city is now two years behind the launching schedule -- a clear proof of the traffic issue not getting due priority.

However, the issue cannot be neglected any more if we want to avoid further slowing down of city life. The short-term measures that must be adopted immediately should include quick repair of the potholed and rutted roads, which are not fit for movement of vehicles. Likewise, waterlogging in the roads has to be prevented through improving the poor drainage system. Then of course there should be a total ban on parking in the streets, which leads to traffic snarls. And emphasis should be laid on training and stepping up of the efficiency of traffic personnel, a point raised many times over by experts.

However, nothing will produce the desired long-term results if the structural limitations of the traffic system are not removed. For instance, road space in the city is quite inadequate (only 7%) and the predominantly north-south expansion of the city has left the east-west links largely neglected and undeveloped. Moreover, unplanned construction of buildings in many localities with no parking space of their own has narrowed down the roads.

That said, better traffic management, strict enforcement of traffic rules and construction of parking lots can still alleviate to a great extent the sufferings of the citizens caught in the immovable mass of Dhaka traffic. The issue should be high on the government's agenda, given its debilitating magnitude and paralytic effects.

Twenty20 off to a brilliant start

Bringing out the best in cricketers

THE inaugural match of the Twenty20 World Cricket Championships had a brilliant kick-off with hosts South Africa winning despite a dazzling 117 scored by Chris Gale of the West Indies in just 57 balls. It was the first ever century in Twenty20 cricket.

With the introduction of this version we now have three types of the game recognised by the world cricket body ICC in addition to Tests and One-Dayers. When Twenty20 was being introduced, some cricket pundits were somewhat apprehensive as to its sustainability just as they were when the One Day Internationals were introduced. With 33 thousand spectators watching the game the other day there should be no doubt in the minds of organisers and enthusiasts of cricket that the game is here to stay and gain recognition as Tests and One-Day Internationals did, if not more. Twenty20 may be regarded as complementary to the other two forms of the game; for, many of the star cricketers of today are playing in it.

It has not only proved to be highly exciting but is also a value addition to the repertoire of techniques contributing to the overall development of the game of cricket.

It is the ultimate test of few of the most important elements in the making of a true cricketer, namely, skill, courage and mettle. It is a test for both the bowlers and the batsmen with very little margin of error. It is high-pressure game to the finish where the batsmen must concentrate on continually scoring fast while the bowlers must work to take wickets as quickly.

Given the new dimension of the game and the performance of our team to-date we are hopeful that the Bangladesh side could someday prove its mettle and make its mark as a first rate cricket playing nation. Now is the time for our aggressive batsmen to play their part and play it well.

We wish the Twenty20 championships a grand success.

9/11, and the surge and upsurge in Iraq



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STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

There is indeed need for changing the strategy in Iraq. Experts opine that neither giving more time for the current strategy to work nor investing more resources, will salvage the current situation, because, as Phillip H Gordon asks in his *Winning the Right War*: "Six years into the war on terror, are the United States and its allies better off than we were before it started?" "Sadly, we are not," he answers, and the reason is that "we have been fighting -- and losing -- the wrong war." He goes on to suggest that tough talk and military power cannot succeed against a diverse enemy.

EVERY year since the horrible terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the world, particularly the US administration, takes a stock of how it has fared from the strategic and security point of view. And the two events that are seen as the aftermaths of 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq, are dissected to either validate or invalidate the rationale of the ventures. And predicated on these two is the much vaunted and, to most of us, the most significant of Bush's project, his global war against terror (GWOT).

While there had been a general acceptance of US campaign in Afghanistan, the moral high ground that the US policy could be perched upon after 9/11 was destroyed by the invasion of Iraq, which no less a person than the UN secretary general had termed illegal. The world leaders, and scholars and opinion makers, must ponder and assess whether the anti-terror has been more harmful than the disease itself, and whether the doctor is part of the problem rather than the solution.

We must also be careful not to

lump the three issues together because, if one were to be faithful to history, one would find it hard to link Iraq with 9/11. Iraq was neither the cause of the Sept. 11 attack on the Twin Towers, nor was it the underlying motivation of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Planning for a possible invasion of Iraq predicated Sept. 11, 2001.

Be that as it may, even the most dispassionate and detached look at operations "Enduring Freedom" and "Iraqi Freedom" will indicate that these have neither brought about anything enduring that the world, particularly the regional countries, can look forward to insofar as Afghanistan is concerned, and one is not certain what freedom President Bush had in mind when he exploited the Twin Tower attacks and the agonies of the relatives of the victims to invade Iraq in March 2003.

The greater part of Afghanistan remains outside the writ of Mr. Karzai. The Al-Qaeda operates with impunity and, with its supporters straddling the Pak-Afghan border, dictates much of the politics on both sides of the

border. Suicide attacks are on the increase, and the Islamists call the shots.

With Iraq taking so much time of the US administration and the space in the western media, Afghanistan features poorly in the press. But that notwithstanding, a report card on its current situation would be a very dismal reading indeed.

A look at the achievements of the last six years should give us a clearer picture of whether the world, and in particular, the Americans, ought to feel more secure now than they did before the two operations were launched. If the index of success is the prevention of terrorist attacks in the US mainland, then that is indeed no mean achievement. But the flip side is that (and I quote US analysts as well as its top ranking lawmakers) major terrorist attacks globally have doubled compared to the six years prior to Sept. 11, 2001.

In spite of the resources at the disposal of the US Osama bin Laden remains at large, directing Al-Qaeda operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and else-

where in the world. And even the most self-assured in the US administration would find it hard to disagree with the assertion that the US is less popular globally, not only in the Muslim world, and a Vietnam scenario is staring in the face of the US policy makers, and its military commanders, in spite of their claims of recent gains in Iraq.

One is not surprised either that Iraq has been hogging the lime-light since March 20, 2003. It was flaunted by Bush and his hawkish neo-con colleagues as the main front of the GWOT. But all it has managed to do is spawn more terrorism globally and, although some may take comfort in the latest State Department report on global terrorism that says "the international community has achieved significant success in dismantling terrorist organisations and disrupting their leadership, which has contributed to reduced terrorist operational capabilities and the detention or death of numerous key terrorist leaders," the attacks have been more violent and have caused more casualties. It is, therefore,

no wonder that there is a demand at home for Mr. Bush to change track in Iraq and formulate a new strategy.

Both a rapid withdrawal and, at the same time, not allowing the Iraq situation to degenerate into a free for all between the three major disparate groups is a tall order. And this is what the Bush administration has been seized with for the last six months in Iraq, starting with the "surge" of US troops in Feb. to contain the upsurge of violence in order that the political objectives (and one is not certain what that might be since by some account there have as many as almost 168 different objectives articulated by the US administration immediately after operation "Iraqi Freedom" was launched) could be met.

The possibility of a Vietnam outcome has perhaps dawned on Bush and his colleagues. One of the aims of the increase in force level in Iraq was to help achieve ethnic reconciliation and establish a political government capable of assuming the security responsibility for the country. The tremendous pressure on Bush to reduce US troops in Iraq is matched by the need to make Iraq look like a success story; after all the billions of dollars spent, and with more than three thousand US soldiers killed, in Iraq, the US cannot be seen to be deserting the country with the prospect of a truncated Iraq divided along ethnic lines.

Unfortunately, things have gone wrong horribly in Iraq. The surge, that was supposed to provide a breathing space to the

Maliki government to allow enactment of appropriate legislation for sectarian integration, has not been made use of by the Iraqi government. In spite of Gen. Petraeus' claim that the military objective is being met, observers say that it has been only a little tactical success.

If the number of attacks has gone down compared to the fall of 2006, it remains much above the levels of 2004, 2005 and early 2006. And, as for the Anbar success, senior ground commanders acknowledge that the fighting is far from being over since the enemy has dispersed.

There is indeed need for changing the strategy in Iraq. Experts opine that neither giving more time for the current strategy to work nor investing more resources, will salvage the current situation, because, as Phillip H Gordon asks in his *Winning the Right War*: "Six years into the war on terror, are the United States and its allies better off than we were before it started?" "Sadly, we are not," he answers, and the reason is that "we have been fighting -- and losing -- the wrong war." He goes on to suggest that tough talk and military power cannot succeed against a diverse enemy.

The world is waiting to see whether the Bush administration goes for a rapid but responsible withdrawal from Iraq or, as one analyst says, run out the clock in Iraq -- handover the problem to his successor.

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Naked truth and more ...



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

Nowhere have we noticed so much of divergence, distrust, suspicion, malice and feeling of animosity against one another existing among the leaders of the same political party. It is the same story in BNP, Awami League, Jatiya Party and LDP. They unite only when it is the question of sharing loot. But on other points they hardly see eye to eye. Because of this loose bonding they easily get eroded and washed away like loose pebbles, to gather no moss.

OME of our readers take a quizzical view of things we write in our columns. But, despite their occasional whims, our columns always reflect the naked truth, and truth is possibly the only thing people do not object to seeing naked. And when it comes to "stripping" those blokes in the full glare of the camera we cannot help but be cruel (only to be kind!).

Take for example the recklessness of the passenger launch owners, who showed no compassion whatsoever when their vessels carried double the capacity passengers and capsized, one after another. When we screamed a bit too loud, pat came the now *jannatbashi* minister before the TV camera to tell us all sorts of incredulous stories about actions being taken against those owners. Nothing happened, and poor passengers continued to die on the river.

Then take the incident at Kushtha, when some senior journalist leaders went there to protest the reign of terror unleashed by the goons of the local MP. The MP and his armed cadre got furious and attacked the meeting with everything near their hands, injuring a senior editor of a

national English daily. And a contingent of the police force that stood nearby demonstrated how yellow-bellied they were in stopping the hoodlums belonging to the ruling party.

Then we wrote miles of columns and reports on the strange ways a senior minister ran his ministry, first the vital home ministry and then the equally important one that handled commerce and trade of the country. He has become immortal with his wayward and at times apathetic comments about law and order, murders and deaths and a crazy market where prices jumped like kangaroos.

We loved to delve deep to find the clever tricks played from behind the curtain by the (in)famous law minister of the country. He was the wickedly witty one and it was truly challenging to unearth his ploys, machination and maneuvering that were aimed at keeping his party perpetually in power.

Then we wrote how our other bloated barristers, the guys from

the legal profession, took the liberty to write their own laws. Power made them "powerpools" and they enjoyed the short-lived power having no inkling that one day they might have to answer for it.

We wrote tirelessly for the last fifteen years about many other ministers and MPs and chairmen and party cadres but no one read them. Oh, we wrote about our (in)famous public servants too! No, we did not forget them either.

They unite only when it is the question of sharing loot. But on other points they hardly see eye to eye. Because of this loose bonding they easily get eroded and washed away like loose pebbles, to gather no moss.

These government officials never cared to serve the people because there was nothing to gain from such service. Rather they thought of serving the interest of the ruling party and gain immensely thereby. As a result, we saw officials getting promoted

to the highest rank, jumping over the heads of other senior officials.

Tale of erosions

Bangladesh is in the grip of two kinds of erosion. One is that of the riverbanks and the other of the political parties. While we, on one hand, see strong currents taking away large chunks of riverbanks, on the other hand, we are witnessing how strong distrust is slicing away groups of self-declared leaders into the void. We

believe that in the process some will be able to return but others will get lost in the abyss of disarray.

Nowhere have we noticed so much of divergence, distrust, suspicion, malice and feeling of animosity against one another existing among the leaders of the same political party. It is the same story in BNP, Awami League, Jatiya Party and LDP.

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Minus one another game

Now political people in various parties have started their own "minus one another" game and this has already splintered BNP into two groups, but there is no guarantee that two will not further breakup into four. Wait and watch what happens in the Awami League.

Here are a few words of raw public wisdom to end today. People often ask us, brother, if the political party leaders are so disenchanted with one another then how can they serve the country as a group? Why don't they do social work individually with the huge sums of money they invest in politics and thus become immortal in their own area?

They further ask, brother, tell us, we take the names of great personalities of this country, like the famous teachers, professors, doctors, writers, scientists, philanthropists, architects, social reformers, researchers and performers with so much of adoration and reverence, then why do we take the names of most politicians with unsavoury (dis)honourifics?

And even knowing this why do people get involved in such activities? Why many respectable people join the rotten kind of politics to destroy whatever name and fame he or she had earned in life? Dear readers, if you have the answer please enlighten us.

Bottom line

The fact that the front ranking leaders of the major political parties are not at all talking in unison about the needs for reforms within the party goes to prove the point that drastic reforms are badly needed there.

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The loneliest job in the world

The next US president will inherit a tarnished America, a legacy of the Bush administration and Iraq, to be sure. But the problem also transcends that failed presidency and war. Restoring faith in America requires major changes in US policy -- an exit strategy for Afghanistan and Iraq and new tactics for dealing with terrorism. New strategies must be built by listening to others around the world to rebuild trust in the US.

BRUCE STOKES

THE recent call for the ouster of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki by leading Democratic presidential candidate Senator Hillary Clinton, echoed a drumbeat of similar demands from neo-conservatives in the US -- suggesting that, whoever wins the 2008 presidential election, Americans' belief in their right to interfere in the affairs of others remains remarkably undeterred by the fiasco of the Iraq War and an explosion of anti-Americanism around the world. Americans who assume that the world's people will revert to loving the US and its policies once George Bush leaves office must think again.

Clinton, Rudy Giuliani, and other principal Democratic and Republican contenders for the White House are out of step with the

global public when it comes to a range of foreign policies. Presidential aspirants have pledged to continue the war on terrorism, the struggle in Afghanistan, and the promotion of American values, especially US-style democracy.

The next president will undoubtedly enjoy a public-opinion honeymoon of sorts, reflecting widespread anybody-but-Bush sentiment. But restoring America's moral leadership around the world not only requires a new president, but also US actions in sync with public sentiments. Current presidential contenders don't seem to realise the challenge they will inherit.

Anti-Americanism is at an all-time high. The recent Pew Global Attitudes survey -- a poll of 45,000 in 47 nations -- underscores the uphill climb facing the next US president. Such positive sentiments remain,

but are ebbing. Since 2002, opinions of Americans as individuals declined in 23 of 33 countries where trends are available.

However, majorities in most countries still like Americans, giving the next president something to build upon, depending on how she or he deals with other irritants fueling the anti-American backlash around the world.

All leading GOP and Democratic presidential contenders promise to prosecute the war in Afghanistan. Senator Barack Obama promised in a June Democratic presidential debate that he would "focus on the battle that we have in Afghanistan. We have to finish the job." Earlier, Clinton had called for an increase in troops in Afghanistan before the US Council on Foreign Relations.

Not to be outdone, Republican contender Senator John McCain said in a December interview with USA Today, that, if necessary, he too would send more troops to Afghanistan.

But each of these Afghanistan hawks risks going it alone. In April 2002, 83 percent of the American people approved of the US military campaign in Afghanistan. Today, 42 percent want the troops pulled out as soon as possible. Of 12 countries surveyed that have troops fighting alongside the US in Afghanistan, only in Britain does a majority still

favour keeping forces there.

If Germany, Canada and the Netherlands withdraw troops, as their populations now demand, the next president must find some way to replace the 7,800 men and women these allies provide, a fifth of NATO's total in Afghanistan. More important, the president must explain to voters why Uncle Sam is left holding the bag, and why increasingly reluctant Americans should shoulder more of this burden.

Finally, all the candidates pledged to restore America's moral leadership around the world. In the June Democratic debate, John Edwards contended that "the single greatest responsibility of the next president is to speak to the world about what real American values are."

He promised to spend his first 100 days in office touring the world to re-establish America's moral authority. He has some explaining to do, as the Guantanamo base festers and images of tortured Abu Ghraib prisoners remain fresh in people's minds.

The global backlash against the spread of Americanism is broad and deepening. In 36 countries, majorities of the public,