

## Ousting goons

### BNP, AL must prove their sincerity

TWO very senior BNP and Awami League leaders agreed in principle at the concluding session of the National Policy Review Forum 2003 that criminals who have settled in their folds are more of a liability than an asset.

In the past, leaders of the two major political parties never tired of claiming that they were against patronisation of criminals in any form or shape. But the reality was that the parties deployed criminals to overpower each other, both in electoral and day-to-day politics. The vision of the leaders was so blurred that they never thought of the belligerent tactics recoiling on them.

That it has boomeranged is evident from the setback the parties have had to suffer in areas where men with tyrannical disrepute represented them, thereby eroding their credibility. The leaders have very rightly realised that godfathers are bound to be Frankensteins, though they might be effective in achieving short-term objectives like subduing a rival.

Now, there is pressure within both the BNP and the Awami League to do away with the services of the goons. The BNP high command is reported to have issued a directive to the effect that gangsters must not be included in the committees of the party. Similarly, AL workers are putting pressure on party leaders to oust the criminals.

Such is the robust intra-party realisation and articulation of the need to de-criminalise politics. We welcome this. The parties are certainly on the right track now, though they seem to have reached a rather belated consensus on this core issue. They should also realise that professional criminals have never been loyal to any particular party; rather, they have exploited the fact that the party-in-power was ready to rely on their services when it needed to clinch an issue through means undemocratic or illegal.

After this meeting of minds, the two parties will now have to concentrate on the more difficult part of the job: exorcising the criminals. However, they have to succeed not only in protecting their own interests but also in serving people who suffer when politics is dominated by killers, looters and extortionists working under the tutelage of this or that political party.

## A warm welcome to the New Age

### English language journalism gets a new partner

WE extend a hearty welcome to the *New Age*, the latest entrant into the very vibrant world of print media of Bangladesh. Ours is a field where more there are the better it is. Devoted to the goals of free speech and propagating multiplicity of views each new newspaper adds to the marketplace of ideas and opinions that constitute the totality of a society's intellectual resource. Every time a quality newspaper comes out the independent press finds a new ally, democracy a new partner and freedom a new voice.

Over the last 13 years of uninterrupted democracy in Bangladesh media in general and the print media in particular have come a long way. There are more newspapers in Bangladesh than ever before and there are more people reading them than ever before. The most heart-warming scene exists in the Bangla press where there are several quality newspapers each vying to serve its readers in ever-newer ways. Just as numbers of newspapers have risen so has their production quality. Almost every big city newspaper is in colour, printed in imported newsprint, in eye-catching layout making for a refreshing news and views diet every morning.

However, the growth in numbers does not necessarily reflect a commensurate rise in its quality. This is especially true for English language newspapers. Here lies the significance of the coming of the *New Age*. We are confident that under the leadership of the most well known and respected editor in English journalism and due to the commitment of a highly skilled and motivated team that the paper has been able to put together, the *New Age* will make a significant contribution to the growth of quality journalism in Bangladesh. The timing could not have been better. As we enter the new millennium we all have to put our head and heart together to take our country forward. And what better way can there be than to give another voice to the independent press.

We wish the *New Age* the very best.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

TRADITIONAL approaches of realism and liberalism in the study of international relations are time worn. While realism emphasises the dangers to the international system where war is always a possibility and its avoidance is contingent upon an order based on balance of power; liberalism is more idealistic which emphasises the problem solving abilities of international organisation like the UN and WTO. Of late, the post-nine-eleven developments in the forms of invasion of Iraq, marginalisation of UNSC, fracture in the trans-Atlantic alliance (some-what embalmated at the G-8 summit at Evian) have diminished the value of the traditional tools used by political scientists in the study of international relations. If Monroe Doctrine was for the American continents, the Bush doctrine encompasses the whole world. Monroe Doctrine was based on defensible principles. It warned that the rights and interests of the United States would be threatened by future colonisation by any European power of the American continents and/or European interposition for the purpose of oppression or control of governments who have declared independence and maintained it i.e. the countries already recognised by the US.

Albeit the Monroe Doctrine was an expression of US power. But it was against colonisation and in defence of liberty and freedom. Bush National Security Strategy, on the other hand, has become controversial from its inception in September 2002 till today as its protagonists and scholar/analysts try to elucidate the concept. Very recently Ambassador Richard Haas of the US State Department (*Planning Policy in Today's World*, Kennan Institute-May 22, 2003) stating the obvious that the US today enjoyed overwhelming primacy and did not have a single rival with global reach said that the challenge for the US remained as it did for George Kennan, General Marshall, Dean Acheson and Harry Truman, "is to use our power so that it safeguards our interests and promotes our values for years and even decades". Salience emerging from Ambassador Haas' tour d'horizon was that inconsistency in policy was no vice since "one size fit all" cannot be a practical approach; various tools have to be used to realise US foreign policy goals; institutions added value if the existing institutions were adapted to the current realities. But the most disturbing strand in Richard Haas' lecture was his warning that the US reserved the "right to act in less encompassing alliance or flexible ad hoc coalition of the willing when the UN or other bodies were unable or unwilling to move against dire

threats". No organisation, not even the UN, he added, had a monopoly of legitimacy.

His is not the lone voice of warning against the international order the world had got used to. Robert Kagan of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace advised that in view of post World War II loss of European power, perhaps the most significant retrenchment of global influence in human history, and Europe's loss of strategic centrality after the cold war, the real division of labour in transatlantic relations should consist of the US "making the dinner" and Europe "doing the

detained after the tragic events of nine-eleven. The rule-based law abiding world was again shocked and bewildered by the transformed definition of sovereignty from the classical one which had helped European stabilisation following the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and has been a source of stability for more than two centuries establishing legal protection against external intervention, offering diplomatic foundation for negotiation of international treaties, in short giving shape to political personality of nations and peoples (promoting decolonisation movement).

was a collective endeavour. Since any collective enterprise would require individual leadership, a single sovereign authority became a logical necessity. Dante spoke in terms of monarchy because he lived in a conflictual era of monarchs and popes when the papacy wielded considerable theocratic and temporal powers. After the demise of the cold war political theorists like Kindleberger put forward the premise of hegemonic stability, albeit a consensual order, in which a dominant global power would be necessary for smooth functioning of an open global economy. Iraq episode

precept that might is right.

Without losing sight of North Korea, Bush administration is now giving undue attention to the third member of the axis of evil. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has put Iran on notice. Any effort by Iran to mould the Iraqi clay in its image would be aggressively put down. The Americans have charged Iran with complicity with Riyadh bombing; harbouring Al-Qaida terrorists; and building nuclear weapons. It is no secret that the Bush administration would not hesitate to encourage implosion in Iranian politics to effect a regime change. In reply Iranian

unilateralism have made a mockery of concepts such as freedom and democracy.

The worrying aspect of the whole drama is whether US allegations against Iran is a pretext for taking revenge for the humiliation suffered by the Americans in the hands of the Iranians more than two decades ago when the then US embassy was occupied by the Iranian mob and American diplomatic staff were held prisoners for a long time. In any case Iran is unlikely to be a piece of cake for any US adventure. During the recently held St. Petersburg summit (1st June) Presidents Bush and Putin appear to have differed on Iran. Though Bush tried to give the impression of mutual concern about advanced Iranian nuclear programme and that they would insist upon Iran not to go for nuclear weapons, Putin expressed Russian objection against using the pretext of nuclear weapon of Iran as a leverage in as an instrument of unfair competition against Russia. In sum President Putin was convinced that there was no alternative to US-Russian cooperation and that the fundamentals of these relations would withstand the test of time. Not so, according to Nicolai Zlobin of the Centre for Defence Information who thinks the four fundamentals outlined by Putin to the Duma had not been realised. Those were: (a) establish closer trustworthiness relations with the US; (b) reestablish relations with EU; (c) straighten relations with NATO; (d) secure Russian interest in Central Asia. With the marginalisation of the UNSC Russia is afraid of losing an important tool of influence in the form of her veto power in the Security Council.

Though Bush and Schroeder did not have a bilateral at Evian (Bush is still very angry over Schroeder's use of opposition to Iraq war to win the general elections) US President was upbeat about the transatlantic relations. On 30th May he told the Poles at Krakow that Poland did not have to choose between Europe and America as they can be good citizens of Europe and close friend of the US. He called upon European nations to invest in modern military capabilities and on NATO to show resolve and foresight to fight beyond Europe. For the US in the foreseeable future ferreting out WMD and Middle East will top her diplomatic agenda with strong commitment to the Atlantic alliance to ensure her security and peace in the world.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is former Secretary and Ambassador.

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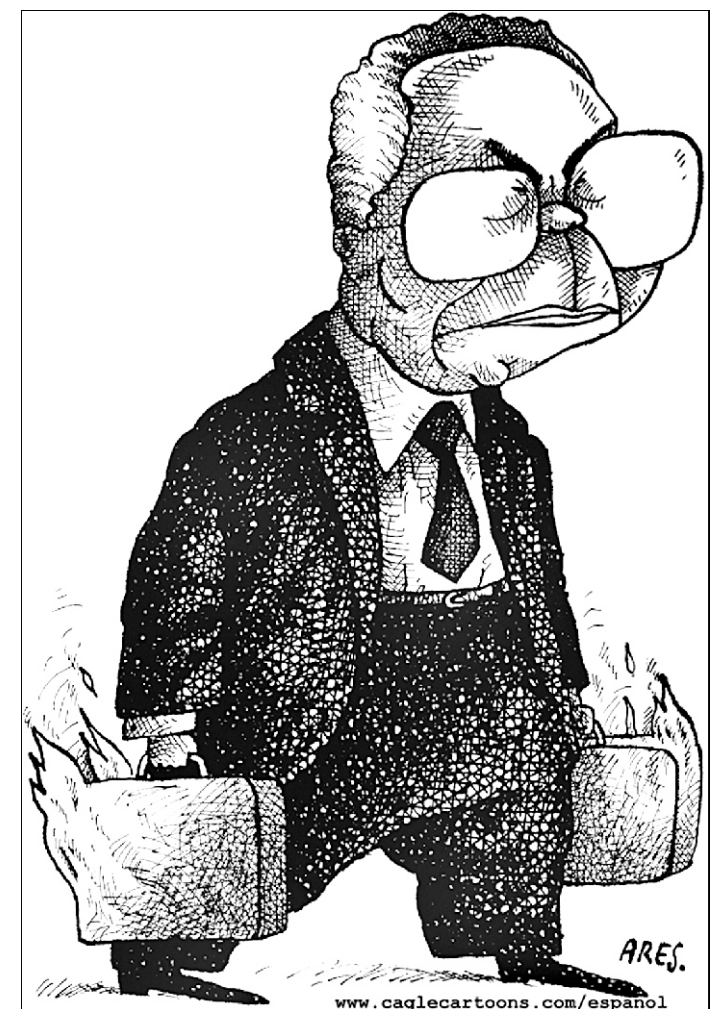
dishes". Prime Minister Blair told his Warsaw audience (before he left for G-8 summit at Evian) that Kagan's thesis, though arresting, was one of many other competing notions. He called upon the US to recognise the European dilemma of wanting to be America's partner but not her servant. He thought security challenges for Europe being of external origin, Europe's preoccupation could no longer be confined within intra-European affairs and there was sufficient convergence of interest to further strengthen transatlantic alliance. Harvard University's Joseph Nye agrees with this argument in his book *Paradox of American Power*. He argues that the true paradox of American power lay essentially in the fact that the US was too powerful to be challenged by any nation state (her military budget is equal to the expenditure of the next eight countries combined), yet the US was not strong enough to handle all global problems all by herself. Indeed the terrible lesson of the nine-eleven tragedy in President Bush's words, "taught us that weak states like Afghanistan can pose as great a danger to our national interest as strong states".

While there is universal agreement on global quest for non-proliferation of WMD and their non-acquisition by states not having such weapons; worry over North Korea's nuclear gambit; dangers of failing and failed states; equally there is disquiet in the rule-based and law abiding world over remarks such as that of Justice Department spokesperson that in the obsessive pursuit to protect American public from harm Bush administration would not insist on scrupulous adherence to the laws. She was reacting to the long awaited oversight report by Justice Department investigators into alleged violation of the basic rights of foreigners

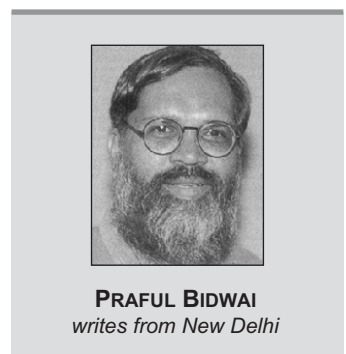
and subsequent developments notably the most recent UNSC resolution 1483(2003) lifting sanctions on Iraq, however necessary was its adoption due to Anglo-US fait accompli through the invasion of Iraq, sets a dangerous precedent and invigorates the stone age

President Khatami told the recently held OIC Foreign Ministers' Conference that the world has suffered from violent dogmatists and arrogant powers. On the one hand, he said, terrorism and fanaticism has distorted religion and on the other hand use of force, domination and

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# Don't trivialise reservations: Rethink upper-caste quotas



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

NOW that Ms Sonia Gandhi has approved Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's proposal to reserve 14 percent of state jobs for the "economically backward" category (EBC) among the upper castes, such quotas are likely to become official policy in one-half of India's states, where the Congress rules.

Yet, no careful deliberation went into Mr Gehlot's suddenly-announced decision, spurred by the demand of the Social Justice Front, representing only 11 castes (of Rajasthan's total of 316).

Mr Gehlot's move has pre-empted the BJP's plans to agitate for EBC quotas and win upper-caste support. BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan first dubbed the move a "political gimmick". But within a week, the party adopted it and demanded a "national commission" on EBC quotas.

The Vajpayee government has since referred the issue to the Attorney General. India's two biggest parties will now fight for upper-caste votes. Both claim it's their agenda.

The BJP quotes a 1985 resolution, and the Congress a 1991 Central order.

Are EBC quotas ethically and politically right? Don't economically disadvantaged Brahmins, Rajputs or Banias deserve reservations, like the OBCs under the Mandal Commission?

The mushy, elitist, negative answer is that all reservations are bad in principle; they devalue "merit". But we know that in India's super-hierarchical society, it's not merit, but

was sanctioned by the *dharmashastras*. Anti-Dalit discrimination and "untouchability" have received more religious legitimacy than any other obnoxious practice in India.

Reservations *acknowledged* this injustice and sought to bring these hitherto-ostracised people into the mainstream. This was morally imperative. The Constitution Assembly debates recognised that although equal opportunity is important, there must "be a provision for the entry of

are some underprivileged *savarnas*, who are under-represented in government jobs. After all, India is a society of "competing inequalities" and injustices, and of uneven development. But reservations cannot address individual grievances.

Again, compare the *quality* of discrimination the wretched of the Indian earth face. Dalits are killed, made to carry human excreta on their heads, and violated and humiliated in a hundred ways. Even an economically better-off Dalit remains socially

necessary.

There's a *practical* problem with EBC quotas too. Almost anyone can obtain a false income certificate and claim the EBC quota. Our rich are known for dishonesty. But it's not easy to fake caste certificates. Nineteen-tenths of such certificates are authentic because even the village *patwar* knows that fake certificates might help his rivals get jobs.

We must distinguish between three kinds of measures to help the socially disadvantaged: affirmative

reconsider EBC quotas. Yet, neither is likely to do so. The Congress has lost most of its upper-caste base in the Hindi belt. It's keen to recover some.

The BJP is desperate to win back eroding support. In UP, its *savarna* base is in tatters. EBC quotas make the BJP salivate. *The Indian Express* quotes an office-bearer: "This ... is going to be the *Ram-baan* (panacea) for all our ailments... [With EBC quotas], we'll beat our adversaries hands-down..."

In the long run, the BJP is better placed to win *savarna* support than the Congress. *Hindutva* has an upper-caste bias, and contempt for religious traditions popular among the lower castes. The *savarnas* also support the BJP's pro-globalisation economics which favours them.

The Congress lacks a coherent upper caste-friendly identity and risks losing its core-support by advocating EBC quotas. This is even truer of other secular parties - the Left, Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Telugu Desam, Janata Dal, etc.

The Congress has a stake in returning to ordinary people's agendas. The BJP doesn't. But will the Congress resist the lure of short-term gains, in defence of its own long-term interests?

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

Strict quotas in school seats and jobs must be available only to the most disadvantaged among the Dalits and tribals, barring all the "creamy" layers. The Congress and BJP should reconsider EBC quotas. Yet, neither is likely to do so. The Congress has lost most of its upper-caste base in the Hindi belt. It's keen to recover some. The BJP is desperate to win back eroding support. In UP, its *savarna* base is in tatters. EBC quotas make the BJP salivate.

extreme stratification, that's important. "Merit" often masks privilege, monopolised by the elite.

The non-sense answer is that there are poor layers among the *savarnas* (upper-castes), but job reservations are *not* the right solution. The state must help those who face chronic *social discrimination*. Upper-caste people don't.

Let's understand the rationale of reservations. The Constitution didn't reserve quotas for Dalits and Adivasis because they are poor (which they are). It did so because these groups faced explicit, systematic *denial of their human dignity*, and *exclusion* from public life for centuries.

The denial of the Dalit's humanity

certain communities which have so far *outside the administration*.

Job reservations for *savarnas* cannot possibly have such justification. *Savarnas* were never excluded from the mainstream or discriminated against on grounds of *descent*. They didn't face a *denial of human dignity*. The scriptures, which they interpret, aren't biased against them as a *group*.

The function of quotas in jobs and educational institutions is not to help *individuals* improve their economic condition, but to empower a *whole community* whose aspirations were crushed. The function is *political*.

This rationale doesn't apply to *savarnas*, however poor. As a *group*, they are privileged. Undeniably, there

*disadvantaged*. Most Dalit children don't remotely enjoy equal opportunity.

The poorest of Brahmins can *excommunicate* a Dalit or impose ritual punishment upon her, however rich she might be.

Given this unique oppression, it's right to reserve jobs for Dalits in *proportion* to their population share. This doesn't apply to OBCs although they too face systematic social discrimination, as the Mandal report documented for 3,743 castes. So, it recommended 27 percent reservation, roughly half the OBC population share.

The rationale of the Mandal report was to break the *savarna* stranglehold on government jobs. This was

action, positive discrimination, and strict quotas in schools/colleges and jobs.

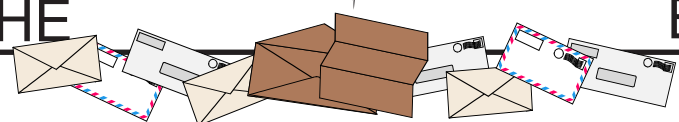
Affirmative action can take many forms: special schools or vocational guidance facilities, and encouragement to specific groups. These can be extended to the truly poor *savarna* strata.

Positive discrimination, such as preference in state employment or school fee concessions, should be confined to Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs alone.

Strict quotas in school seats and jobs must be available only to the *most disadvantaged* among the Dalits and tribals, barring all the "creamy" layers.

The Congress and BJP should

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## National Policy Review Forum

It is indeed a matter of pride and honour that influential papers like *The Daily Star* and *ProDialogue* (CPD) are organising meetings with eminent personalities to discuss national policy for the steps to be implemented for improvement in the country's future. However, the most important sector, 'Education' has been missed out.

The Government may be right when it says that there is a lot of wastage in the education sector and that many girls for whom 'Food for Education' program has been developed are not coming to school. But can we ignore that in most village schools, no education at all is being imparted? In one

primary school that I personally know, a class three girl could not recognise her Bangla alphabets. I soon discovered that the schoolteachers remain busy accounting for missing girls, which can be as high as 20% in a class of 100 during class time. The teachers have to follow up each case and if necessary visit the student's home in order to fill up the required forms. Unless they do this, their own jobs at stake.

Also previously emphasis was made on making students learn by rote; now phonetics is being emphasised upon, so that in the end the child learns nothing! So instead of imparting a minimal level of education, we are crippling these students due to bad management practices. Have our eminent personalities ever wondered why the average graduate nowadays finds it difficult to write a letter, even in Bangla? Our education sector needs a serious uplift and

renewal and future plan if we want to survive in the 21st century. If we do not create educated individuals, what future lies for Bangladesh!

I hope both the honourable editors of *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo* will have an answer to this. The other gaping hole in the policy meetings was that Science and Technology was not mentioned at all and that too at an age where most developing countries are not only investing in this sector, but strengthening it by trying to popularise practical and problem-orientated sciences. It is no secret that technology-based economies, even if they are agrarian, can benefit by inputs from science as well as biotechnology. If there is no science, what will the developed IT sector be for?

Zebat Seraj  
Professor, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

University of Dhaka

*This was a policy brief and a full session devoted to education, which was held on Thursday between 9.30-11 a.m at the National Press Club.*

-Editor

## Corporate democracy or mass representation?

American promise of genuine self-government for Iraq has yet to materialise and the issue is fading as the media gradually diminishes focus on all the pre war promises and hypes. It appears that the USA is happy to deal with Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, or the likes of Tony

Blair, Jacques Chirac, as long as its interests are satisfied. Looking inward to the USA's implementation of democracy gives us some idea as to what it really means for America.

Lets ignore the obvious fraudulent "election" of Bush in Florida. The unrepresentative grip on the "democratic" system by powerful corporations is perhaps the most prominent factor in distorting a system that is supposed to be governed by the masses. Over bribes are conveniently termed as party "donations" by the mass media, who receives a good deal of advertising revenue from the same multinationals. When the US talks about bringing "democracy" it means how it can facilitate its sponsors i.e. Republican party donors to exploit freely, and it has very little to do with providing the needs of the masses in society.

So it is more appropriate to label this as "corporate democracy", rather than the democracy of the masses.

Yamin Zakaria  
UK, London

## Revamping EPB

Export promotion bureau was set up for the promotion of export activities of the country. But it could not attain its goal due to various problems. One of the major problems is lack of efficient manpower in EPB. It may be mentioned here that for realising the dire necessity, the World Bank was suggesting recruiting skilled manpower from private sector to boost the export activities and bring dynamism in the EPB. Our present benign Government is supposed to materialise this suggestion.

It is has been reported in the newspaper that "The proposal to recruit 25 per cent officials in the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) from private sector has received Prime Minister's nod." It is a highly appreciable move and we wholeheartedly welcome the initiative.

In this regard the following recommendations may be considered.

1. For selecting the right person in the right place recruitment should be made through PSC (Public Service Commission) avoiding any political interference.

2. A broad based and flexible selection criterion should be fixed so that maximum number of participants can take part in the competition.

3. Minimum qualifications should be graduation with 15 years experience and age limit should be 45 years.

4. Experienced and qualified persons from the major exporting sector such as garment, knitwear, frozen foods, leather, jute and tea etc shall be given preference.

5. Above all, selection should be made on the basis of merit only. Applications of quota system in the matter will create hindrance in achieving its goal.

M.H.Bari  
Khulna.