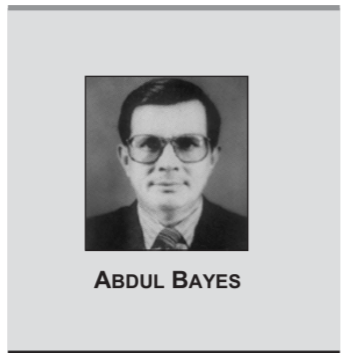


# Groping for good governance



ABDUL BAYES

**B**y the time this article goes to the press, the ruling four-party alliance government might have finished fun-fares organised in connection with completion of its one-year rule. The newspapers reported that the government had chalked out an elaborate programme to highlight its various achievements in various sectors. Surely, the government should have done so to counter the current maize of criticisms centring on the rule of law, human rights, and security situations of the people. Criticisms have also been brewing over the alleged mismanagement, bad governance and their consequent impacts on deepening the depression that the economy. It is true that one year is just one-fifth of the total tenure of a government in this country and hence forecasts on that basis could be misleading. But the adage that "morning shows the day" could, possibly, allow an attempt to foretell the future on the records of the first year of any government.

**Promise and power-politics**  
During the last general election of October 1, 2001, the four-party alliance (now ruling coalition) capitalised mainly upon two issues: curbing corruption and terrorism. There was panoply of pledges but others were not that much emphasised as the aforementioned two. In fact, the leaders of the coalition continue to claim that people of this country voted them to power to eradicate corruption and violence and terrorism. We suppose that there is nothing but the whole truth in that claim. But the pertinent point is: could the coalition government contain the scale of terrorism and corruption or could it develop a system to down-

size the role in future? It is true that progress, prosperity, and problems pertaining to a particular society are continuous process and hence should cautiously be related to a particular regime. But evaluations generally defied this norm and attempted to adduce the outcome-positive or negative- to the particular party in power.

**Creeping corruption**  
One can lean upon the available newspaper and different agency reports to assess the gravity of the

cases, culprits were brought to the book. There are many other such cases where creepy corruption is creeping. It is reported that a total of Tk. 11,000 crores was siphoned off by corruption during the last year. Admittedly, corruption is not a new curse in this country. But what is, perhaps, new is that it is reigning high during a regime, which came to power by pledging to present a society free of corruption.

Politicians rarely understand the

What is the future? Apparently, we fail to foresee any light at the end of the tunnel. This is undoubtedly a pessimist's meat. To make us optimist, the government should follow the recipe for curbing corruption. If the government is serious about curbing corruption, then it should immediately go for the following steps: (a) establishment of an independent Anti-Corruption Bureau and Ombudsman, (b) Separation of the judiciary from the executive, (d) activating Parli-

mentary Standing Committees and (e) ensuring a meaningful Market Economy with less and less government interventions. (Bear in mind that control is at the root of corruption).

**Searching for security**  
Finding and security are said to be the fountains of a market economy. Unfortunately though, the law and order situation is said to be the other field of failure. Even to day when I am at my desk to write this column (10 October and the day of one year completion of the coalition government) four shooting spree at Dhaka city stole news headlines. During the last one year, on average, 10-15 people are reported to have been killed every day - not to speak of extortion, rape and others incidents taking place against human beings. Like corruption, adverse law and order situation is not a new phenomenon. But what is painful, perhaps, is its cancerous growth during a regime that came to power with the promise to improve the law and order situation. Unfortunately from day one, the situation has been getting bad to worse and to the worst ever. The government is alleged to have failed to face the

devils. The fact that four of the elected ward commissioners of the DCC have already been killed by miscreants so far and the living ones are moving around with gunmen and guns, should clearly finger at the fury of the situation with respect to law and order.

**Non-government taxes**  
Economic theory suggests that a government should follow an expansionary policy during the time of economic depression. That means, people should have more

## We condemn the terrorist massacre at Bali

*Stem the scourge collectively*

**T**HE midnight carnage wrought by car bombers at the island resort of Bali has been the most mindless act of terror since the September 11 massacre on the US soil last year.

Foreign tourists were put on travel advisory alert about some places in Indonesia but apparently Bali, the most popular tourist resort to the western world, was excluded. The terrorists have a hugely perverse sense of the 'soft-belly' chink in the armour and never fail to hit out at the most crowded and exposed place turning a complete blind eye to how many human souls would be felled by their cowardly act. That's their trade-mark.

The broader engineering aspects may have been illustrated by the incidents that preceded and followed the Bali mayhem. Over the past week, there has been a wave of al-Qaida linked attacks on US soldiers in Kuwait and a French oil tanker in Yemen. And, then closely on the heels of the bombing at Bali, a second bomb exploded near the honorary US consulate on the same island while another blast shook the Philippine consulate in central Sulawesi province.

The sweeping nature of terrorist massacre in Bali is amply illustrated by the diverse range of foreign nationals falling dead or sustaining injuries. The largest number of victims were Australian followed by the Indonesian, British, French, Dutch, Swiss, German, Swedish, American, Ecuadorian and Italian.

International terrorism is increasingly spanning newer targets and a wider variety of nationalities. It has become more of an international scourge today than at anytime before. Accordingly, the global community need to coordinate much more closely now in its fight against international terrorism - the scourge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as President Megawati, the Indonesian president has rightly put it.

We must make the world a safer place to live in or we risk being undone by the hydra-headed monster that terrorism has frighteningly become. Our strongest condemnation of the mindless and barbaric act of terror perpetrated on the tourist community at the island resort and heartfelt sympathies for the members of the bereaved families as well as for the physically harmed and mentally traumatised survivors.

## More words, less work on arsenic mitigation

*Let's see some action now*

**L**OCAL Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was commendably candid about words surpassing deeds in terms of mitigating the arsenic challenge. He recognised failures "in providing proper treatment to victims of arsenic contamination" and concluded that there had been "more words on the arsenic problem than action". Such a portrayal of real picture, one hopes, will be followed up by sustained activism in the arsenic mitigation area. We don't want to see such an assessment go in vain or give rise to further talking into the ether.

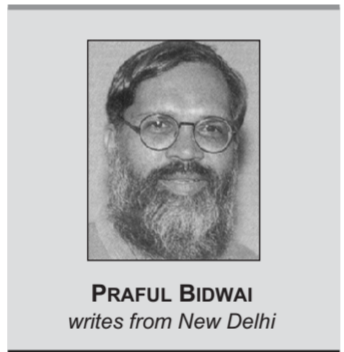
Indeed, we would like to attach a great value to what Mr Bhuiyan told the roundtable on safe water supply and arsenic mitigation, organised by the local government division of his ministry on Sunday. We are encouraged by certain observations made at the roundtable on the way the fight against arsenic contamination has been going on. Scientists are yet to find a specific treatment for arsenic-affected patients and "the treatments provided currently depend by and large on guesswork".

However, we could not agree with the finance minister who sometime ago aired the view that the arsenic problem has been overplayed. Such a statement smacks of political overtone and is actually distant from reality. Some 55 million people, or almost half of the country's population, are currently at risk of arsenic contamination, which, by itself, is an indication of the gravity of the crisis. The LGRD minister has hit the nail in the head when he said that despite significant success in marking out affected tubewells, some three crore people across the country drink arsenic-contaminated water.

The government needs to find alternative ways to supply safe drinking water. There have been much talk about rain-water harvesting, surface water treatment, etc. However, no comprehensive programme has yet been taken in this regard. Time is of crucial importance here. With each passing day users of arsenic-contaminated water are getting closer to a point of no return. In the absence of treatment for arsenicosis, prevention of the use of arsenic-contaminated water remains the only remedy. Failure to provide arsenic-free water is depriving millions of that chance, too.

## Debate over privatisation

*The issue is raw power*



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

**T**HE most ruthless of India's power struggles come masked in genteel clothing, sometimes even in high-sounding words like serious policy "debates".

What makes India's political discourse especially hypocritical is its high moral tone. Thus, slogans about abolishing poverty are used to win electionsto perpetuate anti-poor policies. Constant harping on security can be made to generate insecurities.

Take the BJP/NDA debate on "disinvestment". In reality, this is a dispute over the pace of privatisation of public sector units (PSUs). The real fight is over power and succession after Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Mr George Fernandes sparked off the fight by opposing the sale of the highly profitable Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum. He was vehemently contradicted by Messrs Arun Shourie and Jaitley. But soon the Cabinet put oil-sector privatisation on hold till December.

The issue was prematurely revived partly because the pro-

privatisers used Standard & Poor's downgrading of India to lambast the government. Also, RSS *sarasanghachalak* Sudarshan massively attacked *videshi* policies and demanded their backers be "weeded out".

But S&P's downgrading had nothing to do with privatisation. What triggered it was bad economic indicators, including India's 10 percent-plus fiscal deficit and high public debt.

Soon thereafter, Mr Fernandes, dence for vigorously pushing the *Hindutva* agenda. He also resents Mr Advani's attempt to befriend Ms Jayalalithaa and Mayawati.

Resentment apart, Mr Joshi wants to capitalise on mass suspicion in contrast to elite support of privatisation. Oil-sector sell-offs seem designed to favour certain "Mumbai-based business houses" and multinationals.

Now a "compromise" formula is doing the rounds making public sector ONGC and Gas Authority

rattled the BJP, which admits this was a "mistake".

Such "policy disputes" won't end soon. Mr Vajpayee no longer commands the authority needed to stamp finality upon any decision. He has conceded many powers to Mr Advani who controls the party apparatus. Mr Vajpayee's attention-span and energy levels don't permit a more active role.

Secondly, the privatisation stakes are huge: a multi-thousand crore bonanza for Big Business. For

ist crisis, one can't leave this to "global advisers", i.e., discredited accountancy/consultancy firms. The Comptroller and Auditor-General's preliminary estimate is that Balco was undervalued by Rs 300 crores by "adviser" Jardine Fleming.

When you lack conviction, you are swayed not by the content of policy arguments, but by external lobbies and the fashionable view that privatisation is the way to modernisation. This ignores world realities, including ineptitude and elitism. Regrettably, India's biggest Opposition party is not attacking its weakest link. The Congress is internally divided with neoliberalists like Mr Jairam Ramesh for privatisation, and the party's Left wing against.

Ms Sonia Gandhi has not resolved the tension, although the recent Pachmarhi and Bangalore resolutions reject wholesale PSU sell-off. The result is policy paralysis. The Congress will pay a heavy price for this.

But the biggest loser will be the incumbent NDA. It has nothing to show for itself. Its only credible asset stands devalued: Mr Vajpayee's declining moral authority is revealed even on the Cauvery dispute.

He is probably India's sole Prime Minister to have failed to bring together two chief ministers fighting over water-sharing. He doesn't even insist they obey the Supreme Court's orders.

Mr Vajpayee is not seen by the public as someone independent of *Hindutva*. The latest *Outlook-Sapthik* survey says, 28 percent people think Mr Vajpayee is the "true representative" of *Hindutva*, as compared to Mr Advani (15 percent) and Mr Sudarshan (10 percent).

The *Hindutva* gang despises Mr Vajpayee for his pro-Western views. The liberals detest him for being pro-*Hindutva*. Mr Vajpayee is heard with more respect than other BJP leaders. But he only speaks when he is sure he enjoys Mr Advani's support. That's not real leadership.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

including the anti-privatisation backlash in the developed countries. The current debate has sent the NDA hurtling towards greater policy incoherence.

The BJP-NDA's preoccupation with privatisation contrasts with its shocking indifference to burning problems 65 million tonnes in state granaries, and \$65 billion in foreign exchange reserves, while there are starvation deaths. A severe drought has aggravated unprecedented joblessness and growing hardship for the millions amidst an economic slowdown.

This is the ideal moment to expose the NDA's incoherence,

including the anti-privatisation backlash in the developed countries. The current debate has sent the NDA hurtling towards greater policy incoherence.

The BJP-NDA's preoccupation with privatisation contrasts with its shocking indifference to burning problems 65 million tonnes in state granaries, and \$65 billion in foreign exchange reserves, while there are starvation deaths. A severe drought has aggravated unprecedented joblessness and growing hardship for the millions amidst an economic slowdown.

This is the ideal moment to expose the NDA's incoherence,

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

### PM on BBC

It is admirable that the PM answered to questions from listeners of BBC. She would have earned more admiration if she were forthright in accepting some of her government's shortfalls.

One wonders how well protected she is from truth of the time by her sycophants! Two glaring examples are her responses to queries regarding wheat scam and treatment to the deputy leader of opposition in Barisal and Bhola.

MAH, Dhaka

### Let Bhutan also use our ports

It is a very wise decision to let Nepal use our ports. In addition to the earnings generated at Mongla and Banglabandha ports associated with these trades, it will also enhance the image and influence of Bangladesh in the Sub Himalayan region. As helping the eastern Indian provinces is not welcome by our hard-line rightist politicians, we have already lost huge business potential there.

I request the government to explore the same kind of trade partnership with Bhutan. As Bangladesh has been practising functional democracy since 1990, has the most stable government and its people live with an exemplary communal harmony among all sub-continental countries, it is time to promote our country's image across the borders. It is not always military power, which earns the neighbour's respect, sometimes just well intention and helping hands can do that.

As there is some sort of tension with Myanmar about repatriation of Rohingya refugees, we can explore the same opportunity with Myanmar sometime later after gaining a couple of years of experience of doing business with Nepal and Bhutan.

Hasanat M Alamgir  
Vancouver

### Do I really miss home?

It is two o'clock in the morning and I have just walked home alone after a never-ending study session in the library. On my way back I was thinking about how much I miss home.

Besides all the good things Dhaka has to offer, I even missed the heat, the pollution, the traffic jams, the hawkers and the noise! That's why I was checking *The Daily Star* website to catch up with what was going on back home. All it had to offer was news about rape, murder and other crimes.

Come to think of it, if I was coming home at this time of the night in Dhaka, I would be probably lying somewhere, raped and murdered right now. These are the things that make me wonder whether I really miss home! I mean, am I really missing out on anything good by leaving Dhaka?

We always complain about the brain-drain etc. but given the choice, what incentive do we really have to be back home and settle there? The promise for an insecure life? One of the main agendas that our politicians and law enforcers should concentrate on is to improve the quality of life our country has to offer. Otherwise, we will lose many more bright and talented professionals.

Somaia Shafeem, On e-mail  
Politics of

### nomenclature

In Bangladesh, the politics of rhetoric and politics of nomenclature go hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder.

Recently, the government has re-named the Abdul Hannan International Airport in Chittagong as Shah Amanat International Airport. This measure of re-christening the airport could not be seen as an innocent mark of showing respect to the religious leader only; an insight into the whole paraphernalia reveals a design to score political advantage.

And in this political dribbling, the name of the religious celebrity like Hazrat Shah Amanat has been used with a view to attaining more than one purpose-- first to exploit people's religious sentiment that nobody would dare protest this kind of re-naming and then to score by downgrading the political rivals. The same paradigm figured glaringly in re-naming the Syed Nazrul Islam Bridge at Bhairab Bazar as Bangladesh UK Friendship bridge. This time the scapegoat is the friendship of Bangladesh with the United Kingdom.

### Punching above its weight

The venue: Blackpool Conference of British Labour.

The orator: Tony Blair  
Tony Blair famously warned that a hypothetical non-compliance with weapons inspection by Saddam Hussein regime in future will not destroy the American or British authority but destroy the authority of the United Nations itself.

Tony Blair is pulling a punch way above his own weight and that long after the British Empire collapsed. Indeed, America is the military Gulliver of the world today but it is Britain much above a military Lilliput threatening weaker countries and people?

Tony Blair is all fury and thunder;

almost condescendingly allowing the UN any role, before he joins his mentor and "monarch" in neo imperial conquest of Iraq. His earlier "dossier" did not, must be to his frustration, get a good grade on credibility or substance.

We clearly recall the same redoubtable orator for peace and justice did not even whimper when the UN "Fact Finding" mission was scuttled by Israel, and Israel flouted a record number of UN resolutions since 1967 with complete impunity.

Was the authority of the UN destroyed or was it enhanced? The hypocrisy has exceeded all limits.

### Don't lie

At the end of each bargain the salesman always says that the price offered by the buyer is even lower than the cost. At that point both the salesman and the buyer know that the statement is an utter lie. Why tell a lie when the buyer always knows that as a lie? Come on Mr salesman, no one even asked you the cost price!

This attitude prevails almost everywhere in our society. Are we,

### ERRATUM

The word "reprieve" was inadvertently printed as "rexprieve" in the heading of yesterday's first post editorial on Kashmir polls. The error is regretted.

The list may be longer, but let's try to truncate it. Let not lying become a part of our culture.

Shaer  
Shantinagar, Dhaka