extent the increased government

and non-government taxes would

help an economy dipping into

The rise of foreign exchange

depressionary spiral

Peripheral plus points

DHAKA TUESDAY OCTOBER 15, 2002

LATE S. M. ALI

We condemn the terrorist massacre at Bali

Stem the scourge collectively

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 Sulaweshi prov-

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 21st 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 survi-

More words, less work on arsenic mitigation

Let's see some action now

OCAL Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuivan 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 Bhuivan 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 arsenicaffected 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 arseniccontaminated water.

The government needs to find alternative ways to supply safe drinking water. There have been much talk about rainwater 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 arseniccontaminated water remains the only remedy. Failure to provide arsenic-free water is depriving millions of that

Groping for good governance

lar party in power



ARDUI BAYES

Y the time this article goes to the press, the ruling fourparty alliance government 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

size the role in future? It is true that cases, culprits were brought to the progress, prosperity, and problems book. There are many other such cases where creepy corruption is pertaining to a particular society are continuous process and hence creeping. It is reported that a total of Tk. 11,000 crores was siphoned should cautiously be related to a off by corruption during the last particular regime. But evaluations generally defied this norm and year. Admittedly, corruption is not a attempted to adduce the outcomenew curse in this country. But what positive or negative- to the particuis, perhaps, new is that it is reigning high during a regime, which Creeping corruption came to power by pledging to One can lean upon the available present a society free of corrup-

newspaper and different agency Politicians rarely understand the reports to assess the gravity of 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 Parliadevils. 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

reserves is welcome news. Thanks to the increased flow of remittances and for the steps taken to attract remittances through official channels. The macro-economic indicators seem to have behaved reasonably well. The setting up of the various commissions to look into public expenditure, revenue loan defaults etc. should help trimming various harmful omissions. The concern over environmental hazards and the consequent steps taken could yield dividend in future. But successes like these are submerged due to alleged bad governance all round. Looking at future

Without improving upon governance especially security of people and freedom in exchange, the slogan for globalisation, competitiveness, productivity etc, are likely to remain as mere lip services According to economists, the ongoing and upcoming crisis confronted by the economy are, for example, falling exports earnings and import payments, losing more jobs than are being created, falling investment, rising prices of essential commodities, etc. These are wake-up calls and go to imply that the coming years for the coalition government will be chilly and challenging.

To meet the upcoming challenges, we think that the party in power should change some of its perceptions and mind set. First, confrontational politics with the opposition should be stopped immediately to make politics and parliament meaningful. Second the Parliamentary Standing Committees should immediately be set up to address the issues of corruption and law and order situation And third, task of the separation of the judiciary from the executive-an election commitment of the coalition-should be finished within next few months to ensure better application of the rule of law.

We are still looking for a better performance. Let's get to good

Abdul Bayes is professor of economics,

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Without improving upon governance especially security of people and freedom in exchange, the slogan for globalisation, competitiveness, productivity etc, are likely to remain as mere lip services. According to economists, the ongoing and upcoming crisis confronted by the economy are, for example, falling exports earnings and import payments, losing more jobs than are being created, falling investment, rising prices of essential commodities, etc. These are wake- up calls and go to imply that the coming years for the coalition government will be chilly and challenging.

situation with respect to corruption during the last one year. According to Transparency International (TI)a source on corruption level frequently cited by the ruling coalition during last general election to embarrass Awami League- Bangladesh continues to be the top most corrupt country in the whole world. For argument's sake, even if the scale of corruption is assumed to remain constant, it should be treated as a failure on the part of the present government since it had earlier promised to pinpoint it. On the other hand, new allegations of massive corruption were brought in. For example, Denmark brought serious allegation of corruption against a minister of a particular ministry. The donor country is reported to have withdrawn the development funds from that Ministry. This is, perhaps, for the first time that a foreign country had to forgo its aid commitment on account of corruption. The wheat scam still haunts the minds of the people and it could be gathered from reports that some ruling party lawmakers were involved in these unlawful practices. The purchase of Kerosene in the name of jet fuel

costs of corruption. Even if they do so, they pretend to be uninformed (ignorance is bliss!). Various studies have shown that 2-3 per cent of GNP is annually lost due to corruption. Thus, for example, if the realised growth rate of our GNP is 5 per cent per annum it means that the actual growth rate was 7-8 per cent. That could have generated, say, a per capita income of around US\$570 in 1997 when our per capita income was in fact US\$ 350. In other words, the economic growth rate that is required to make a dent to the pervasive poverty level in Bangladesh is generated but actually not realised on account of corruption. A rise in corruption thus tantamount to a rise in poverty level and vice versa. To be more specific, if Bangladesh could maintain its growth rate at 6-7 per cent during the last decade by attaining a corruption level of say Hungary or Poland (moderately high corruption by ICG index), possibly, we could see almost a poverty-free Bangladesh now! Thus, without addressing the issue of corruption, poverty eradication policies and programs are likely to remain useless and inef-

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

Freedom 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

projects to generate employment and income. But along with a rise in government taxes, nongovernment taxes in the name of extortion by mastans has also been on a rise. Both the types of taxes have added to the cost of doing trade and business in Bangladesh and thus eroding the business environment. The presence of non-government taxes is related to the overall law and order situation. In recent dialogues organised by various non-political Chamber Bodies, the issue of nongovernment taxes tended to dominate the dialogues. The consensus is that the deteriorating law and order situation has substantially

contributed to the rise in the costs

of business and a decline in the

inflow of investibale surplus, both

domestic and foreign. It is yet to be

ascertained, however, to what

purchasing power to grease trade

and business. But the Finance

Minister came up with an arsenal of

new taxes to raise revenue during

the last budget session. The idea,

however, might be meaningful if

and only if the transfers to the

exchequer could be spent on

socio-economic development

governance.

ineptitude and elitism. Regrettably,

India's biggest Opposition party is

not attacking its weakest link. The

Congress is internally dividedwith

neoliberals like Mr Jairam Ramesh

for privatisation, and the party's Left

resolved the tension, although the

Ms Sonia Gandhi has not

wing against.

Debate over privatisation

The issue is raw power



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

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 elections to perpetuate anti-poor policies. Constant harping on security can be made to generate insecu-

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

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 proprivatisers 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 suspicionin contrast to elite supportof privatisation. Oil-sector sell-offs seem designed to favour certain "Mumbai-based business houses" and multinationals.

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

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

Such "policy disputes" won't end soon. Mr Vaipavee 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

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 reali-

recent Pachmarhi and Bangalore resolutions reject wholesale PSU sell-off. The result is policy paralysis. The Congress will pay a heavy price for this 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

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-Saptahik 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 Vaipavee 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 eniovs Mr Advani's support. That's is not real leader-

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist

TO THE EDITOR

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 the anti-privatisation backlash in the developed countries...The BJP-NDA's preoccupation with privatisation contrasts with its shocking indifference to burning problems65 million tonnes in state granaries, and \$65 billion in foreign exchange reserves, while there are starvation deaths. A severe drought has aggravated un-

HRD minister Murli Manohar Joshi and petroleum minister Naik jointly questioned disinvestment "modalities". This prompted Mr Vajpayee's outburst defending disinvestment as "our chosen path". This mantra is now recited as a self-fulfilling incan-

Practically it makes no sense to sell PSUs when world and domestic markets have fallen by 25 to 40 percent over one year. This means the sell-off push comes from shady

Mr Joshi's entry into the debate is meant to open up the Vaipavee succession issuedespite Mr Advani's elevation as Deputy PM. Mr Joshi enjoys the RSS's confi-

"iunior partners" of private bidders for HPCL and BPCL. Another proposal is the non-"strategic" sale of HPCL, and later, BPCL's total sell-

precedented joblessness and growing hardship for the millions amidst an economic slowdown.

These are not "compromises" The government is simply selling the Family Silver to Pay the Butler. Cash-rich ONGC and GAIL don't need foreign principals. As argued four weeks ago, there is no case for selling core-sector PSUs.

Telecom minister Pramod Mahaian has joined the fray by opposing the Tatas' total control of VSNL. His casethat the Tatas bought VSNL for (an undervalued) Rs 1,439 crores and immediately siphoned Rs 1,200 crores outhas

the RSS, it means losing a loyal swadeshi constituency The RSS and VHP are totally

disappointed with the NDA's dismal performance. They want another option in case it loses the next election. That's why they floated the Jammu State Morchaat the BJP's

Third, the pro- and antiprivatisation debaters aren't speaking out of conviction or knowledge of economics. They don't agree on a broad economic framework in which to place disinvestment, or on criteria to resolve micro issues. Take evaluation of a PSU's worth.

After the post-Enron global capital-

EDITOR TO

ties, including the anti-privatisation backlash in the developed coun-

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 problems65 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

PM on BBC

It is admirable that the PM answered She would have earned more admiration if she were forthright in accepting some of her govern-

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-liner rightist politicians, we have already lost huge business

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 commuharmony among all subcontinental 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

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 miss ing 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.

Somaiya Shameem, On e-mail Politics of

nomenclature

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

Recently, the government has renamed 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 Bangla desh UK Friendship bridge. This time the scapegoat is the friendship of Bangladesh with the United King-

All of these religious deities in heaven must be looking upon us with disdain and laugh at the way they are being made pawns of dirty political games in Bangladesh. Dibash Ahmed

Punching above its weight

Bandar, Chittagong

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 is Britain much above a military Lilliput threatening weaker countries and peo-

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.

Now the US Secretary of State has famously warned, again on hypothetical (and before the event), that weapons inspectors will not be allowed to work unless a new resolution is passed. Whatever has leaked suggests that draft new resolution is crafted to elicit a negative response by Iraq. A trigger mechanism seems to be in place to launch a "legitimised" attack on Iraq on speculative hypotheses and before evidence is produced. We have

seen how the US became prosecutor, judge, jury and executor at the same time in Afghanistan

To all intents and purposes, the US has already shown very little need and scant regard for UN and other multilateral obligations, institutions and Conventions. And after September 11, this trend has increased. Does the world community need to be insulted again by this hypocrisy that is not only crass but also so self-evident? Hussain

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 buver know that the statement is an utter lie. Why tell a lie when the buyer always knows that as a lie? Come on Mr salesmen, no one even asked you the cost

This attitude prevails almost everywhere in our society. Are we

as a nation growing a habit of telling es and becoming immune to it? Two more lies we are habituated

1. "Please pray for me."

"Sure. I always do. Do we really pray for the person? How many times do I pray for some-

one else other than for myself? 2. "Please visit my house. "Sure I will." Do I really plan to visit his/her

house when I am promising to do

The list may be longer, but let's try

to truncate it. Let not lying become a part of our culture.

ERRATUM

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