

## BJP sweep in Gujarat

*A shadow cast on Indian secular politics*

THE near-sweep of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Gujarat assembly elections should give a severe jolt to the complacency of secular and liberal democratic forces in India. In the aftermath of a prolonged Hindu-Muslim riot, which claimed some 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, the Gujarat electorate had been expected to vote the hindutva card-playing BJP out of power. The riot and the anti-incumbency factor aside, the BJP had another front to worry about: poor performance of the Narendra Modi government in the development sector. There had been serious uproar against acute power and water shortage across the state. Besides, the go-slow implementation pace of development work had stretched the Gujaratis' patience to its limits. While no one actually had expected the main opposition Congress to turn the table on the BJP, riding on the public discontent, there had been anticipation that the ruling party's wings would be clipped to a great extent. So much for political prophecy!

Now, the crucial question is what does the BJP victory in Gujarat elections mean in Indian political context? There is a view that it marks a new phase in Indian politics: a passing phase, not a shift in overall political trend. However reassuring it might sound, it nevertheless is premised on a fragile footing. The Modi victory may not be "the product of temporary anxiety, which will soon be overcome by the wheeling and dealing of normal politics", as one Indian political scientist has put it. It may have also proved that the Congress, which has stood for secular and liberal democratic values for generations, has either lost or started losing its appeal to the Indian electorate. The Congress' occasional pandering to Hindu sentiments at the campaign stage might have diluted its overall stance in Gujarat.

The Gujarat success, no doubt, will encourage the hawks in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the centre to try out some safe-fron strategy in the next general elections. What it means is that the secular and liberal democratic forces in India will be hard put to stave off an unusual upsurge in Hindu nationalism. Should they fail, India will cease to be repository of liberal democratic values.

## School admission rush

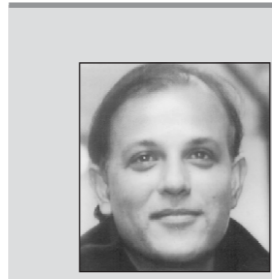
*Some more capacity building needed*

ANXIOUS parents waiting outside school compounds as their children sweat out to take admission tests is a common sight in the city at this time of the year. But most of them are likely to get disappointed with the end-result. As it is, there is a dearth of good schools in the capital, and those known to be good ones do not have enough seats to accommodate all the hopefuls. The scramble to collect admission forms from as many schools as possible is set to intensify in a week's time even though the front ranking government and private schools have already made known the limited availability of seats for each class in them.

We believe a few measures are urgently required to help ease the enrolment rush and find berths for a larger number of school-age children. Uniform teaching standards need to be maintained between government and private schools. The schools have to be brought under close and regular inspection so that the management of those schools becomes accountable for their performances and at the same time, parents can also feel comfortable while sending their wards to those schools. Increasing the number of schools, both government and private, could be an option, but without good teachers and honest management, such steps will not bring any desired success.

As the battle for the parents to find a place at the best school continues good connections rather than merit could sometimes earn admission. Better management practices would help streamline that aspect. Some schools could begin double shifts to accommodate the increasing number of students every year. But the standard of teaching would have to be maintained in all such schools, for the sake of the country and also for the children themselves.

## Sen on human rights



K.A.S. MURSHID

FOR the past couple of weeks some of my well wishers (including my own mother!) have been trying to tell me something. "These are uncertain times and one must be careful," they said. "Would it not be possible to write about 'other' things, or perhaps be less direct...at least for the time being?" My argument of course has been that we are a proud, democratic nation with a FREE press and a glorious tradition of respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law. We have one of the best judicial systems in the world while our lower courts, despite being part of the executive, remains a splendid island of independence and autonomy -- so much so that even the ruling of the higher courts can be treated with disdain. And of course, we must exercise our rights from time to time, for otherwise these become rusted, and ultimately forgotten.

I must confess however that the force of my argument appears to have gone largely unappreciated by my audience -- pity! At any rate as an obedient son, I thought I should indeed write about 'something else' this week!

Professor Amartya Sen was in town recently and it was, as always, a pleasure to listen to him. His lecture was essentially on human rights, a subject that he has thought about deeply and written about extensively. In these troubled times, it may be appropriate to review his 'three critiques' on human rights, an

endeavour I am sure that even my mother would approve.

Sen identifies three types of critiques against human rights -- these he first describes, then dissects and ultimately hopes to have destroyed. YOU will have to judge whether he has succeeded in this mission.

### Three critiques

How can human rights have any real status unless these are enshrined in

human rights. In order to justify that name, human rights must be thought of as being universally applicable to all societies and all cultures; in practice, it is argued, that no such universal values exist. The most well known articulation of this view is that of Malaysia's Mahathir who introduced the notion of Asian values as opposed to 'Western' ones -- thus demonstrating considerable scepticism to ideas such as those of universal human

a mainstream view that any talk of 'rights' must be accompanied by adequate arrangements to ensure access to it. A person's right to something involves somebody else whose duty it is to provide that something if 'right' is to make any sense. Without such an arrangement, talk of human rights is essentially 'hot air', devoid of content. Sen however believes that "human rights are...shared by all -- irrespective of citizenship -- the benefits of

many parts of the region, although strikingly, these justifications have come, not from independent historians, for example, but from the ruling elites themselves! This type of reasoning often receive implicit support from modes of thought from the West itself, where there is a widespread view that political freedom and democracy are ancient features of Western culture, i.e. values that are not to be easily found elsewhere. Thus the promotion of

dispute any Western claims of uniqueness in terms of being particularly endowed with a tradition and culture of freedom, religious tolerance or a higher morality. Thus, for example, Akbar (the Great) issued a number of enactments in the year 1000 of the Hejira (1591-92), including the following:

-- No one should be interfered with on account of his religion while anyone may convert to any religion that he pleased;

-- If a Hindu had been made a Muslim against his will, he is to be allowed, if he so chose, to go back to the religion of his fathers.

Sen notes wryly that at about the same time that Akbar was making these enactments, the Inquisitions were in full bloom in the heart of Western liberalism in Europe!

### Bottom line

Sen took considerable pains to prove that human rights should be treated as universal and that these are not uniquely embedded in Western history, tradition and culture. He also emphasised the need to argue for political change from the point of view of these rights, even when or perhaps especially when these are not sanctified by the laws of the land -- as these are fundamental and inalienable, irrespective of who you are or where you are. Under the circumstances, we have a clear duty to address this question to everyone out there, especially in these difficult times, to respect these inalienable rights that are guaranteed under the Constitution and enshrined in the Human Rights Charter to which Bangladesh is a signatory.

Dr K A S Murshid is an economist and Research Director, BIDS.

## BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

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the Law and backed up by the State? Human beings are no more born with human rights than they are born fully clothed: rights are acquired through legislation as clothes are acquired through tailoring -- there are no 'pre-tailoring' clothes just as there are no 'pre-legislation' rights. Sen calls this the 'Legitimacy Critique'.

The second line of attack is referred to as the Coherence Critique, which essentially revolves around the notion that human rights cannot mean very much and are at best, heart warming sentiments or 'lumps in the throat' in the absence of mechanisms ('agency') that ensure adequate provisions. For example, the right to food makes little sense unless there is an agency charged with the job of responding to that right.

The third line of attack raises the question of the universality of

rights. **The Legitimacy Critique:** The legitimacy critique has a long history, including Karl Marx's position that rights cannot precede (rather than follow) the institution of the state and Bentham's view that 'natural rights' are "nonsense". Both views insist that rights must be seen as instruments rather than as a set of 'prior ethical entitlements'. Sen, however, makes the point that setting human rights within a narrow legal framework is too restrictive; these must really be seen as ethical claims that remain valid IRRESPECTIVE of the legal, justiciable basis of those claims and should form the basis of making POLITICAL demands. In other words, the actual legal status of rights within a particular socio-political context cannot detract from their universal character.

**The Coherence Critique:** There is which everyone SHOULD have". Even in the absence of an individual or agent entrusted with the task of fulfilling these rights, these claims can be "generally addressed to ALL those who are in a position to help". Even when many such rights remain unfulfilled, Sen believes it is still useful to be able to distinguish between a "right that a person has which has not been fulfilled and a right that a person does not have".

**On Asian Values:** This critique has received quite a bit of attention and stems from the premise that there are other sophisticated cultures that focus, not on rights, for example but say, on discipline or loyalty. In particular, where human rights include claims to political and civil liberties, some Asian theorists have alleged tensions e.g. with Confucian or Asian values. In particular, Asian values have been invoked from time to time to justify authoritarian rule in

human rights in the third world is often seen as bringing in Occidental values to Africa and Asia, where the latter are invited to 'join the club of Western democracy' and to admire and endorse traditional "Western values".

Much of the strength of the authoritarian interpretation of Asian values is based on interpretations of Confucianism. Sen however suggests that Confucius has been misappropriated by the champions of authoritarianism who have chosen to deliberately ignore the diversity of his teachings to serve their own purposes. For example, Confucius did not recommend blind allegiance to the state and does not 'forgo the recommendation to oppose a bad government' even when stressing loyalty to the family and the state.

Sen also takes a look at ancient Indian and Islamic traditions to

## The impossible is possible: Kenneth Arrow at Rajendrapur

WAHIDUL HAQUE

KENNETH J. Arrow is visiting Bangladesh to attend the meeting of the South Asian Network on Development and Environmental Economics. I read the news in utter disbelief. How could the impossible be possible? The theorist of all theorists at the root of all grassroots!

Professor Arrow has long been known as one of the greatest economic theorists of all times. He began his career by using abstract mathematics as the vehicle of economic analysis and continued to do so till his mid-career when I personally came in contact with him in 1959 as one of his PhD students at Stanford. By then, he had turned around and laid down the real foundation of another (to my mind, the principal) area of economic theory, i.e. General Equilibrium Analysis and Welfare Economics. Besides their independent contributions, Gerard Debreu and Leonid Hurwicz collaborated with Arrow in this great reconstruction.

From abstract theory, Professor Arrow would occasionally wander into practical issues like medicare, racial discrimination, management of large organizations, water resources management, etc. He would also think of new issues and advance new ideas such as the economics of information.

Professor Arrow was supervising us three South Asians in the early Sixties. We were trying to construct mathematical models for developing economies. With his myriad involvements he could squeeze in, even then, Third World "dual economies" to Keynesian price rigidity in his well-known 1967 article "Samuelson Collected". But never did I realize that his interest in the Third World would be so profound as to enable him to come down to a remote place like Rajendrapur. Yet what better a place could one find to appreciate problems of development? I am sure original ideas will

be coming forth from his participation.

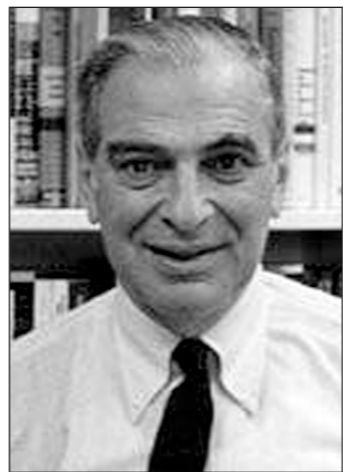
For over a halfcentury the word "impossible" has been famously connected with the name Kenneth J. Arrow. A child prodigy, Arrow

called a compromise by proving that if individual preferences are "value restricted", then the majority rule is a social choice principle that satisfies the first four of Arrow's axioms. By Arrows reckoning, then, the majority

rule could be a dictatorial one. The reader has by now guessed that the lad from Manikganj is none other than our own Amartya Sen. Professor Arrow found time to write scholarly articles on meteorology, pure mathematics, statistics, philosophy and psychology maintaining professional standards of rigor and originality. Yet he did not shy away from real life. His monumental work on social choice, though completed when he was barely twentyfive, was yet delayed by a four-year stint as a Captain in the US Air Force during World War II. In mid-thirties, he went on to become a member of the Council of Economic Advisors of President John F. Kennedy.

decades. What Arrow meant, I think, was his indignation expressed in "Samuelson Collected" at the "scandal" in macroeconomics, i.e., the lack of a microeconomic foundation of macroeconomics or, more technically speaking, the absence of an integration of goods and money in a general equilibrium model. Of course, Keynes was the first economist to broach this subject in his General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money and his policy prescriptions have guided public policy for several decades now. Yet he did not (more correctly, could not) provide the needed microeconomic foundation.

Economic information is asymmetrically distributed - some have more, some less and the former are more advantageously positioned than the latter. Asymmetric information tends to make "lemons" (poor quality goods) drive out "diamonds" (quality products) from the market. This phenomenon, to my mind, is akin to the phenomenon of uncertainty about the "State of Nature" that the Arrow-Debreu theory has accommodated to some extent. But admittedly more needs to be done... The methodology that Arrow and Debreu have developed will probably need to be extended and new mathematical ideas developed for realizing this goal. Welcome, Maestro, to the land of your pupil.



Professor Kenneth J. Arrow

became the idol of the profession when he had hardly joined the academic world of economics. His supervisors at Columbia expected the budding genius to write a brilliant thesis for his PhD degree. For his first creative work, young Arrow chose to answer a question that had baffled every philosopher, political scientist and social thinker at large since Aristotle: What is ideal democracy? The answer given by Arrow in his thesis entitled "Social choice and individual values" (John Wily and sons, 1951) turned out to be not only his first, but also his greatest, cre-

tion) of individual preferences. (ii) Transitivity : Of three alternatives if society prefers A to B and B to C, then it prefers A to C. (iii) Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives : If some alternatives are withdrawn from a collection of alternatives, society's ranking of the remaining alternatives is unchanged. (iv) Unanimity : If everybody prefers A to B, so does society. (v) Nondictatorship : There is no individual whose choice is the social choice in the absence of unanimity.

Using symbolic logic and set theory, Arrow proved his famous Impossibility Theorem. There is no social choice rule that obeys all five of the above criteria. In other words, if the first four criteria are met by a social choice principle, it must be that of a dictator.

Commenting on Arrow's Noble win in 1972, Paul Anthony Samuelson wrote, "Aristotle must be turning over in his grave" in response to Arrow's discovery that ideal democracy is a "chimera" -- a logical contradiction. Arrow's discovery stunned all social scientists and philosophers. Slowly rising from the ashes of democracy some sixteen years later, a home town boy whose roots are traced to the "Judge Bari" in Manikganj district in Bangladesh provided what may be

individual values help form "this" individual value and vice versa. This individual value formation with mutual reinforcement is also a kind of social choice though not covered in Arrow's theory of social choice. But his theory comes with full force when we enlarge the general equilibrium theory to join private goods with public goods and realize that government really means the sole provider of public goods and that one hundred percent public ownership of an enterprise producing only private goods does not make the public enterprise in its economic characteristics any less private than a similar wholly privately owned enterprise.

With public goods comes money with Keynes and macroeconomics. And this makes me reminisce and be personal. Sometime during the first half of my four-year stay at Stanford for some reason or other I uttered the word "macroeconomics" and Professor Arrow said, "Now you are coming to the heart of the matter". Sometime again during the second half of my stay, I uttered the same word and the same response followed. Years later, destiny made me tumble at the door of money and macroeconomics in quest of whose "heart" I devoted almost all my energy during the last couple of

decades. What Arrow meant, I think, was his indignation expressed in "Samuelson Collected" at the "scandal" in macroeconomics, i.e., the lack of a microeconomic foundation of macroeconomics or, more technically speaking, the absence of an integration of goods and money in a general equilibrium model. Of course, Keynes was the first economist to broach this subject in his General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money and his policy prescriptions have guided public policy for several decades now. Yet he did not (more correctly, could not) provide the needed microeconomic foundation.

Economic information is asymmetrically distributed - some have more, some less and the former are more advantageously positioned than the latter. Asymmetric information tends to make "lemons" (poor quality goods) drive out "diamonds" (quality products) from the market. This phenomenon, to my mind, is akin to the phenomenon of uncertainty about the "State of Nature" that the Arrow-Debreu theory has accommodated to some extent. But admittedly more needs to be done. In his Presidential Address to the American Economic Association and also in his earlier Nobel speech, Professor Arrow made a modest reference to his formidable contributions to Social Choice theory and General Equilibrium theory and mentioned that he only gave the idea of information economics which others developed. I have a feeling that all three fields belong to an extended general equilibrium theory - an economic counterpart of the physicists' Unified Field Theory. The methodology that Arrow and Debreu have developed will probably need to be extended and new mathematical ideas developed for realizing this goal. Welcome, Maestro, to the land of your pupil.

Dr Wahidul Haque is Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto and a former Finance Minister, Government of Bangladesh.

## OPINION

## Where is Bin Laden?

ABDUL ALIM

AMERICA, with such a mighty intelligence network and overt and covert operations failed to catch Bin Laden, dead or alive. An unbecoming feat for the world's number one superpower! In the olden days of Cold War era we were awed by the knowledge that Americans can track a toilet flush in Kremlin by their satellite tracking system. But this gentleman has eluded all such perceptions. Or has he?

It is almost one and half years since we witnessed billions-of-dollar

war on Afganistan and how the US military campaign targeted Al-Qaeda hideouts in the mountains of Afghanistan, in Kandahar, Tora Bora, and the rugged terrain near the border with Pakistan. It is a mystery how Bin Laden managed to escape (if at all) this awesome assault when his nearest aides have fallen into the hands of US intelligence? Only recently Abdel-Rahman El-Nashiri, a key member of Al-Qaeda, was captured by the Americans.

But not Bin Laden. In a recent audio recording aired by Al-Jazeera and relayed by other

international satellite channels, Bin Laden praised the bombings that targeted Moscow, Bali, and a French tanker off Yemeni shores. He threatened more reprisals against US forces and their allies. The recording raised many questions. Even Russian President Putin wondered, in a joint press conference he held recently with President Bush, about Bin Laden's whereabouts and the puzzling question of failure by the US authorities to locate him.

Having examined the recording and questioned imprisoned Al-Qaeda members about its authen-

ticity, it is none other but the US experts themselves who confirmed that the voice on the tape is Bin Laden's. Yet US authorities have so far failed to provide information, speculative or otherwise, about Bin Laden's fate. How is he supposed to maintain communication with his aides? How does his outfit manage to finance the terrorist attacks that have taken place or may take place in the future? Is there an alternative secret command running the show in Bin Laden's absence?

Recent issues of *Time* and *Newsweek* discussed the question of Bin Laden's disappearance. One

theory was that he was hiding with Pakistani tribes on the Afghan border. Another was that he had gone to Yemen, homeland of his ancestors. The latter possibility may explain why US pilot-less planes have been deployed in Djibouti to reconnoiter Yemen.

The scant information released by US authorities about Bin Laden may be incongruous, but one thing is clear: the United States is the lone beneficiary of the mystery surrounding Bin Laden's fate. Bin Laden's recordings, randomly produced and difficult to authenticate, are being used to scare off outsiders as well

as Americans. Meanwhile, draconian laws are being passed in the US. Political pressures are brought on ally and foe alike. And President Bush's pretext to punish members of the so-called axis of evil proceeds unhampered. Uncle Sam is unlikely to wait for 'material breach of trust' by Saddam Hussain. His preparation is complete.

Perhaps Bin Laden has been killed, perhaps not. For all we know the Americans may be secretly holding him. Anything is possible, so long as Washington benefits from his legend and the actions attributed to his outfit.

Audio recordings by Bin Laden can be faked. They can be used to justify harsh measures against being placed under surveillance, harassed, and discriminated against, on the pretext of minimizing threats of terrorism.

Every day we hear reports of Bin Laden's aides being arrested, of sleeper cells uncovered in Italy, France, Germany, Canada, and elsewhere. Most of the time the charges are later dropped, but the damage to the lives of those concerned is done.

The very name of Bin Laden is

being used to suspend due process of the law. Innocent people are arrested without charges and being thrown in jail for months without trial. A new horizon of human rights' abuse is dawning. A new set of justifications, however flimsy, are now available for repressing the Palestinians and attacking Iraq.

Perhaps the truth about Bin Laden's fate may dampen the onslaughts on the present world order!

Abdul Alim is a businessman.