

## Anarchy at DMC

Those responsible must be brought to book

THE rampage at the administrative building of Dhaka Medical College climaxing in the locking of the Principal's room last Saturday was a glaring example of rowdy student behaviour. The student union led by ruling party student organisation had allegedly demanded that the fee for admission form be increased beyond Tk 20 and they be given a share of the surplus. Some of the student leaders denying the allegations said that they never put pressure on the authorities to increase the fee. Apparently, in a change of tack lately they added that they were only protesting the 'irregularities' committed by the authorities.

We notice that the authorities have promptly taken action and dissolved the central students union after reports of the incidents were published in newspapers. We thank them for it, but there is a long way to go before the punitive process is brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

We suggest that an appraisal report be prepared on the activities of established students unions throughout the country so as to keep a tab on their omissions and commissions by way of extortion, corruption, irregularities and other forms of tyranny. They often force the authorities to toe their lines in securing undue advantages from the positions they hold as representatives of the student community. For example, they wield influence in admitting students of their choice to classes, bending the administration to suit their personal and political agenda, taking part in tender bidding, changing exam dates and even meddling in pass and fail matters.

In such an environment, good teachers become disinterested in teaching, thereby causing the standard of education to fall. Unless the ruling party can fully rein in the wayward among its student party elements, the events that took place at DMC on Saturday might repeat at other educational institutions as well. The best way the government can ensure this is by holding an inquiry into Saturday's incidents and punishing the culprits without mercy.

## Ban on use of children at the polls

Let's make sure it works

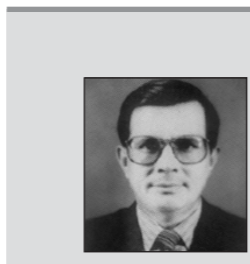
THIS is a step in the right direction. In a thoughtful and farsighted move, the Election Commission has banned use of children in electioneering. The restriction is imposed keeping in view the Union Parishad polls due between January 25 and March 16. This is one-off for now, but how much we wish that it be applicable for all elections, national or local bodies.

Significantly though, the ban will be intensely tested at the Union Parishads, because elections to the UPs are a massive affair; by far the largest number of constituencies is involved in these grassroots polls. It has been a common practice to entice children into swelling the ranks of the rival candidates' supporters afield. Their natural zeal and gullibility make them sitting ducks to recruitment by their self-centred and short-sighted elders. They throng meeting venues as if rushing to a carnival and take out processions for the candidates with a festive fervour. They are also sent on errands by interested quarters and in the process initiated to the wiles of complicated power-play in the rural adult world. Often they are goaded into playing second fiddle to the different candidates' muscle power. They are thus baptised in ways that can neither help the fairness of the polls nor their normal development as citizens of the century in the longer run.

Our experience with restrictions and bans shows that their presence is felt more in their breach rather than application. At first there would be sneaking floutation of the rule and if that's not dealt with an iron hand in time, there will be a cracking disobedience eventually to contend with.

Child abuse for electioneering purposes should be easily detected and nipped in the bud. Since the voting age is 18, anybody below that age should stand debarred from electioneering. Crucially, an appropriate monitoring mechanism needs to be in place so that all election campaign activities are truly devoid of child abuse in any shape or form. In the ultimate analysis, it's thorough auditing of the campaign details and expenditures that will unravel where it had gone wrong.

# Debt-driven drugs and drugs-driven debt



ABDUL BAYES

SUSAN George is the author of the book called "The Debt Boomerang -- How the Third World Debt Harms Us All". Written few years back I would like to call it an "Economic Thriller". The title of the book is just the tip of the iceberg that contains vivid projections of the debilitating effect of debt on some sample countries. Fortunately or unfortunately, the sample was drawn from Latin America. Susan attempted to show that the debt burden of some of the Latin American countries (e.g. Bolivia, Peru and Colombia) led these economies to bank on the production of cocaine -- the main ingredient of drug.

### The reeling-rich

In a televised speech to the nation in 1989, President George Bush (the father of the present President of America) declared a "war on drugs" and instituted a multi-million-dollar project called National Drug Control Strategy. The call came at a time when, allegedly, 13 million Americans were dragged by the use of illegal drugs. Complacency, however, loomed large on another count: 13 million was almost half of 23 million of 1985! But sooner complacency recoiled with the news that the fall in numbers was due to a

fall in "casual users" while the number of "hard-core" users rose at a rapid rate.

Why drugs are damned? After all, it gives consumers some satisfaction may be in terms of stimulation. It also provides sellers with some economic returns from the sale of drugs. The abuses could, possibly, be adduced to its spillover negative effects or negative externalities (smoking has also negative

to large-scale production of cocaine, the main ingredient of drugs. At the advice of the multinational donor agencies like IMF and the World Bank the economies, allegedly, embarked upon creating surpluses to pay for the debt. And, there were no other easy alternatives at the hands of the economies other than producing cocaine to get quick returns. However, with large-scale production, there developed

ing or transporting coca and its derivatives." According to a former Finance Minister, this half a million "generate through their earnings further economic activity creating another 300 thousand jobs". The employment multiplier is thus very high and "if narcotics were to disappear overnight, we would have rampant unemployment and there would be open protest and violence". The traditional 'economics'

become the main source of generating foreign currency in Bolivia above the value of all legal exports to the country..." According to some estimates, coca and cocaine production accounted for about one-third of Bolivian GNP.

Since independence in 1825, Bolivia chalked up more than 180 coups *d'etat*. The successive military governments went to run and loot the country by nurturing drug

Tin Council (ITC) in 1985 left huge stocks of tins virtually worthless. "It would easily cost a producer country six times more to mine a ton of tin than the market could pay for it". Bolivia's second income earner was natural gas but exports to Argentina was dashed by Argentina's own debt induced cash crunch problems.

### Drug as disease

"Fried" by the crisis all around, especially faced with an 'annualized' inflation rate of 60 thousand per cent, the structural adjustment plan took off the ground -- in the name of New Economic Policy (NEP) -- heavily loaded with loans and lessons from IMF. Losing public enterprises were laid off with thousands of workers forced to queue for cocaine production. Bolivia's fate was tagged with the success of NEP whose success again was tagged with cocaine. Cocaine production was so much rewarding that a hectare of land planted with coca could earn for its tenant at least \$ 1200 a year compared to the average annual wage of a miner at \$27, a factory worker at \$650 and non coca producer at \$ 150.

While revenues earned from coca put Bolivia on an even keel, the ramifications all around remained pervasively painful. Drugs appeared as disease and many families of the West were tangled into drugs-driven debt. Mr. Bush had to wage a war against a disease called drugs the production of which was the outcome of tough IMF conditionalities. For the short run, drug was life for Bolivian economy but death for others. But in the long run, all are dead with drugs.

Abdul Bayes is professor of economics, Jahangirnagar University

## BENEATH THE SURFACE

While revenues earned from coca put Bolivia on an even keel, the ramifications all around remained pervasively painful. Drugs appeared as disease and many families of the West were tangled into drugs-driven debt. Mr. Bush had to wage a war against a disease called drugs the production of which was the outcome of tough IMF conditionalities. For the short run, drug was life for Bolivian economy but death for others. But in the long run, all are dead with drugs.

externalities but not so much sinful to the society, perhaps). Allow me to cite few statistics from Susan's book: (a) Three quarters of the users were White, 12 per cent Black and most of the rest Hispanic; (b) Most consumers of the illegal drugs came from upper or middle class educated people...nearly one-fifth of high school seniors consumed drugs atleast once in a month. The dreadfulness of drugs could be guessed from the press reports in mid 1990s: "robbery and murder rates are running at record levels and cocaine is being found in the urine of the majority of those arrested in the major cities."

Why was there a boom in drug trade in the 1980s? Susan argued that the heavy debt burden of the Latin American countries -- Bolivia, Peru and Colombia -- pushed them

large network of marketing, distribution and consumption. In each of the processes, large number of people got employment. In other words, drugs seemed to appear as deaths to many but life to some.

### Bankrupt Bolivia

Bolivia was, at the time of writing the book, one of the poorest countries of Latin America with the lowest life expectancy and the highest infant mortality rates. More than four-fifths of the rural population groaned under extreme poverty. Once upon a time, Bolivia's major export item was tin and the country had comparative advantage in cocaine production. One out of every three or four was found to be engaged in drug related activities. Half a million of Bolivia's population "are reported to be involved in cultivation, process-

ing or transporting coca and its derivatives." According to a former Finance Minister, this half a million "generate through their earnings further economic activity creating another 300 thousand jobs". The employment multiplier is thus very high and "if narcotics were to disappear overnight, we would have rampant unemployment and there would be open protest and violence". The traditional 'economics'

trade. It is ironic that United States reconstructed military establishments during the 1950s and 1960s, which during the 1970s and 1980s was led by high level officers. They pursued -- under militant anti-Communist platform -- illegal trafficking of illegal drugs to the US. The generals who captured power left behind consumption and fraud and not productive investment for Bolivia to grow. As a result, the country emerged as highly indebted country and by the mid 1980s, Bolivia's GNP dropped by one-fifth, per capita consumption fell by one-third, family income plunged by 28 per cent and there was an unprecedented rise of unemployment. On the other hand, Bolivia's main legal exports faced crisis in the international market. Price fluctuations and the bankruptcy of the International

# Hindutva's harvest of hatred : Gujarat shames us all



PRAFUL BIDWAI

writes from New Delhi

NO single phrase can describe the stunning quality of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Gujarat victory. The closest analogy is the hysterical support for the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s after repeated pogroms of the Jews and drumming up of ultra-nationalist rhetoric about German "honour".

Gujarat too witnessed a breakdown of all processes of rational thinking -- and mass-scale dehumanisation. Mr Narendra Modi electorally exploited the worst butchery of Indian citizens since Independence.

Gujarat's results overturn many established trends. Take just three: anti-incumbency, (lack of) fragmentation of the opposition, and caste alignments.

The BJP's governance was appalling. Over five years, it ground down Gujarat from India's fastest-growing state to a laggard, with 1.1 percent growth and with a wasteland of closed factories. Crippling water and power shortages and corruption alone should have caused a five to 10 percent vote-shift against the BJP.

Unlike in 1998, the BJP's opponents' were united. Caste/tribal equations also favoured them.

Yet, none of this mattered. Not the post-Godhra Constitutional breakdown, nor even the fear that Gujarat would economically collapse under Mr Modi.

What mattered was communal polarisation, primordial hatred and Gujarati chauvinism -- as distinct from pride in an Indian identity.

and soft-Hindutva. The Congress didn't realise that communal madness couldn't be fought by raising development issues, roping in *sadhus*, and projecting former BJP chief minister Shankersinh Vaghela.

What Gujarat needed was an ideological anti-communal challenge. None was mobilised either immediately after Godhra, or during the elections.

The failure is national. The

some causes of the *unique* strength of communalism in Gujarat: rapid industrialisation without modernisation of values and institutions; rigid caste identities; absence of social reform; rise of sectarian Hindu cults; anti-Dalit anti-Muslim violence since the 1980s; and the ultra-conservative influence of North American NRIs (of whom Gujarat has the highest proportion in India).

The election results are a set-

over the party's *parliamentary* wing. The success of their early bid for power will depend as much on the Vajpayee leadership's capitulation as on the core-group. Whether or not Mr Vajpayee fades out is an open question.

The BJP's bargaining power has risen inside the NDA. Its Alliance partners (the BSP is not one) were irrelevant to the Gujarat victory. It can treat them with less respect.

frustration related to factory closures.

These conditions do not obtain in most states going to the polls soon -- Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Delhi.

The Congress faces incumbency disadvantages here. But leveraging them is one thing. Using *Hindutva* to launch a campaign of killing is quite another.

Of course, the BJP could engineer communal violence in some states, including Uttar Pradesh. That would be playing with fire -- adventurism that could as easily rebound as succeed. There isn't much of a substitute today for normal, "standard", politics, of exploiting your opponents' weaknesses through your own novel programme or identity.

How far Mr Modi can influence the BJP's strategy remains to be seen. But he has emerged as the mascot of a muscular version of Mr Vajpayee's own Hindu nationalism. Never before has an Indian politician made such huge electoral gains -- literally -- on dead bodies. For the moment, Mr Vajpayee is tailing Mr Modi. He speaks like VHP-RSS leaders in wrongly blaming Muslims for not condemning Godhra enough. He terms the Gujarat victory the beginning of a Vijay Parva ("era of BJP triumph").

We must ensure it becomes the "era of defeat". Gujarat's results are an offence to democracy and a collective shame for us all.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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Once the politics of "Miyan Musharraf" vs "Hindu patriots" gripped minds, people suspended their conscience, and succumbed to Mr Modi.

For the first time anywhere, the BJP crossed the 50 percent vote-share mark. Given the first-past-the-post system, this translated into a huge 70 percent share of seats.

The most important reason for this gain is the 10 percentage-point rise in BJP votes in central and northern Gujarat, the regions most affected by post-Godhra violence. Equally remarkable was the defeat of 11 "moderate" BJP candidates -- at the hands of the VHP-RSS.

In contrast to the BJP's hardball tactics stand the Congress's timidity

Gujarat carnage was a national shame. All secular parties should have agitated the issue nationally, in the streets.

If Morarji Desai could force Indira Gandhi to dismiss the Navanirman-besieged Chimanbhai Patel in 1974 by going on a hunger-strike, couldn't our Centre-Left leaders have compelled Mr Vajpayee to impose President's Rule?

The Congress failed to confront Mr Modi on his campaign's *core-issues*: the Godhra "conspiracy", "Miyan Musharraf's" support to "terrorism", Gujarat's "self-esteem". The Congress grossly underestimated the communalisation of the middle class.

In April, this Column discussed

back to pluralism, secularism and democracy. They call for a *radical change* of secular strategies.

Three questions arise: Will the results alter power-balances inside the BJP? Will they affect government policy? Has the BJP found a new ("Modi-fied") formula to combat the anti-incumbency factor which plagues it?

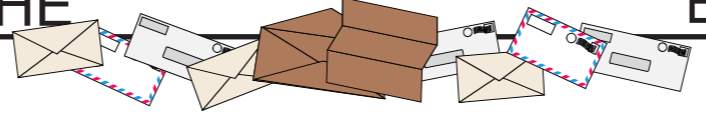
First, Mr Modi's victory will raise the weight of the hardline *Hindutva* lobby within the BJP, itself allied with the VHP and RSS. Mr Modi's core-group, including party president Venkaiah Naidu and general secretaries Arun Jaitley and Rajnath Singh, is likely to be strengthened.

But barring one, its leaders have no base. They cannot easily take

It is unclear to what extent the hardline group can compel Mr Vajpayee to accommodate its nominees in the Cabinet. The power struggle has yet to evolve. However, there will certainly be a Rightward shift in NDA policies on Pakistan, Kashmir, terrorism, military expenditure, and nuclear weapons.

The question of electoral strategy is critical for the BJP. The "Modi Formula", of instigating large-scale violence in a communally charged situation, is specific to Gujarat. It assumes a high level of penetration of *Hindutva* in *civil society*, communalisation of the administration, and extreme brutality against one group of citizens. Highly industrialised Gujarat is also marked by

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



### "Priscilla freed, at last!"

We are relieved to hear that Priscilla Raj has been freed at last. But why did it take the Government five days to release her after the High Court order? The Government must explain us the reason of this delay.

Are we to believe that if the government wants they can and will defy court order if it goes against their interest? Is it only the general people who must follow the rule of law and the privileged ones can do whatever they can?

This is anything but democracy.  
Shamsul Alam  
Lalmatia, Dhaka

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Though there was a High Court order, Priscilla Raj has been release after five days. Why? If the Government can defy court order then where would the general people go? Where would they seek justice?

Who would bring back the five days that has been lost from Priscilla's life? I hold none but the Government responsible for such blunder.  
Afroze Chowdhury  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

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We elected BNP with the hope that they would follow the democratic path in governing the country and

improve the deteriorating law and order situation. But the way they are ruling the country is anything but democratic.

They are suspicious about anyone and everyone. They have brought sedition charge against a number of people without giving a thought how serious a charge is this. They have taken a number of prominent citizens into custody and are treating them like the worst type of criminals. They do not even hesitate to torture them while in custody.

What the released (at last) interpreter Priscilla Raj claims regarding being tortured emotionally and physically while in custody has shocked and stunned us. Is this why we have voted BNP to power? What was Priscilla's crime? Is working as interpreter illegal in our country? Is there any proof that she acted against the interest of the country while serving as an interpreter of the two channel 4 journalists? These foreign journalists were released a long time ago. Then why were the local ones treated differently?

The Government has been claiming that the Opposition and a vested quarter are up against ruining the image of the ruling party and the country. The way the ruling party is running the show, do we need anyone else to damage the image of Bangladesh?  
Sadat Sami

### Indira Road, Dhaka

### Blasts in Bangladesh

Aren't the people in Bangladesh allowed to watch movie during the biggest festival in the country? What was the fault of those innocent victims of Mymensingh blasts that they had to meet such a horrific fate?

It is evident that humanity in this part of the globe has been on exile. We have no guarantee of life, no security nothing. And without giving a thought about the general people, the ruling party and the opposition has as usual started blaming each other regarding the incident.

People of this country now feel frightened to attend any social gathering, cultural activities etc. Who is this force that is trying so hard to restrict the Bangladeshis from celebrating a few festivals they have in a country where they always have to fight against poverty, political unrest and natural calamities?

True, the people in general have been afraid of possible bomb attacks in social gatherings etc. Still this invisible force with malicious intention has not been successful in prohibiting us from attending these events. The massive attendance of people from all walks of life in the Victory Day celebration programmes speaks for itself. No matter how hard this anti-

Bangladeshi force try they will never be successful to destroy our Bengali spirit and love for our culture and heritage.

Md. Asheque Islam  
IBA, University of Dhaka

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Have we achieved independence and established democracy so that there is no security of life and property of our people in our own country?

There were several bomb blasts during former Awami League's government. Now the history is being repeated under the BNP government. Many innocent people have lost their life and been wounded so far in these blasts. But neither the former government of Sheikh Hasina nor the present government of Begum Khaleda Zia have been able to arrest any one responsible for those incidents. This proves the inefficiency and incapability of both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia to run the government.

The old habit of AL and BNP to make accusation and counter accusation against each other for all ills in the country is not the solution of any problem. Rather our socio-economic, political and administrative problems and law and order situation would get from bad to worse day by day due to AL-BNP

bitterness. But why, what is the benefit for the people and the country?

O. H. Kabir  
Wari, Dhaka

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It is more than terrifying to learn what has happened in Mymensingh. Such incidents took place more than once when the present Opposition was in power. It has happened again and the ruling party BNP has already started blaming the Opposition without any shred of proof.

If this kind of incident takes place while the army drive is still on, then what options do we have for restoring a peaceful society? We shiver to think what will happen when the army will return to the barracks.

On the one hand, the Government is trying to proclaim that Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim country without even giving a second thought that the world is not the same again after the September 11 and there is every possibility that some Al-Qaeda or similar-minded components may exist in Bangladesh which might carry out these kind of heinous crimes. And on the other hand, the Opposition is trying to portray Bangladesh as a safe haven for Islamic terrorists just to embarrass the Government not caring a hoot about the image of the

country.

The future of Bangladesh does not look bright.  
Muktadir Shahid Hossain  
University of Tokyo, Japan

### Sheikh Hasina and our image

Whenever Sheikh Hasina goes abroad, she becomes the centre of various controversies raised due to her irresponsible utterances against the Government and her country and its people. The vested quarters by taking advantage of such utterances publish irresponsible and baseless reports to defame our country.

We do not understand what benefit our Opposition Leader derives from making these comments abroad. If she has anything to say against the Government she can always do so while she is in the country. Nowhere in the world a Leader of Opposition is found defaming his/her own country abroad.

After her recent visit to Europe, the European Parliament came out with a subversive report against Bangladesh. Then after her recent visit to Thailand some unknown organisation came out with another baseless report on Bangladesh regarding the so-called HR violation during the on going Operation Clean

Heart. After that immediately upon her arrival in India, their Foreign Minister came out with a malicious and motivated allegation of Al-Qaeda existence in Bangladesh.

The Opposition party has a responsibility to uphold the image of the country. Is our Opposition Leader carrying out her responsibility successfully?

M Ataul Hoque  
Dhaka

### USA must not attack Iraq

The USA dismissed Iraq's weapons declaration. We knew that the Bush administration would reject it giving lame excuses because America's aim is to attack Iraq on any pretext. If it is possible the US may even plant some evidence to prove that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction. When America itself possesses a huge amount of weapons of mass destruction and so do many other countries, why is Iraq being targeted?

President Bush will not remain as the President of the US forever. I wonder how he wants to be remembered-- as a ruthless, unjust and vindictive person or as a wise, kind-hearted and noble one?

All over the world anti-America feeling is growing fast. President Bush should stop a moment to

assess the situation.

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

### Catalytic converters for automobiles

I refer to the recent letters published in your daily on catalytic converter. It appears that the Government has not looked into this matter thoroughly before enacting the law regarding fixing of catalytic converters in the automobiles. Subsequently many problems have cropped up for implementation of the Govt. decision.

I therefore suggest that for the greater interest of the people the Govt. should call a meeting of automobiles experts, scientists, environmental experts, lawyers etc. and review this matter in order reach a solution. We should also check with our neighbouring countries like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand who have taken steps to control the pollution problem created by automobiles. Their experience will certainly help us to solve our problems regarding this matter.

We should always remember that we are a poor country and should take steps in such a manner that would not burden our taxpayers.

S. Ara  
Dhaka