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#### MPs speak out

BNP should not ignore the home truths

OW the ruling party lawmakers themselves have addressed some key issues that the detractors of the government and civil society members have been talking about for quite some time. The ruling party MPs spoke out at their parliamentary party meeting in a fashion not witnessed in the past. It is a good thing that they felt the need for ventilating their opinions and the party leaders also gave them a

Criticism from within always tends to have more bite, for obvious psychological reasons. The top BNP leaders have finally heard from their own men that things are not shaping up well in some important areas of public concern. For example, the MPs have advised the prime minister to downsize the cabinet by dropping the 'corrupt and inefficient' ministers who are a burden to the party. Issues like price spiral and precarious law and order situation were also raised. The prime minister did not quite agree with them, but could not refute the charges labeled against the minis-

The MPs deserve appreciation for having done a great service to the country as well as their own party. The BNP high command cannot ignore certain truths which need little elaboration or proof. Time is running out, but it is still not too late for the party to take correc-

The MPs who have expressed their lack of confidence in some ministers have actually acted in the best traditions of democracy. Unfortunately, our brand of it never had enough space for dissenters and nonconformists. That of course has not been anything positive for the political culture of the country. The MPs, by speaking out, have also shown that criticism of the government is not, nor should it be, a sole prerogative of the opposition. The party leaders, for their part, should realise that there is truth in what is being said about the alliance government's performance. It should now open its eyes, being no longer under the impression that some opposition evil spirits are trying to mislead people, and take appropriate action before things go beyond repair.

#### More blues for Bush

*Unsteady leadership in war on terror* 

HE revelations this week from Richard Clarke, counter-terrorism adviser to every US president since Ronald Reagan, come as a body blow to the Bush administration. The Bush administration was already reeling from the fallout of the Iraq war and the general perception that it misrepresented the case for war. Its credibility took a further hit with Clarke's

Clarke reveals that prior to 9-11, the Bush administration, in contrast to its predecessor, paid little attention to the terrorist threat, that immediately after 9-11, the Bush administration wanted to bomb Iraq and not Afghanistan, and that the Iraq war has been counterproductive to the war on terror.

The last point was already fairly apparent, but the first two revelations are highly damaging to Bush. Bush is running for reelection this year as a leader in the war on terror and has been trying to convince the rest of the world to follow the US lead internationally.

Now Richard Clarke's disclosures suggest that Bush has provided extremely poor leadership in the war on terror. We also find more evidence of the administration's mendacity -- for instance in its constant refrain that the Clinton administration had left the US unprepared for a terrorist attack. Now we find out that the Clinton administration was very focused on terrorism. and that it was the Bush administration that ignored the issue. Now we see why the administration has been so desperate to stonewall the commission looking into how 9-11 could have occurred.

The Bush administration's response has, so far, been unpersuasive, and, in some cases, patently dishonest. In continuing to mislead and deny, the administration reveals its most dangerous fault. The Bush administration never admits that it was wrong about anything and refuses to learn from its mistakes. This is why the administration's credibility is now close to zero. If they do not admit where they have gone wrong, how can they ask anyone to follow them? The Bush administration is incapable of providing the leadership the world needs right now.

### What goes around comes around



HARUN UR RASHID

HERE is a common saying that, in politics as in life, around. The defeat of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar (Lopez) in the election on 14th March underscores the political significance of the universal truth.

Aznar was one of the ardent supporters of "regime change" in Iraq together with President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The Spanish Prime Minister, disgraced by telling palpable lies to his people that the Basque separatists (ETA) were responsible for the Madrid attack, was himself victim to "regime change" by his own people. The "regime change" in Spain brought painfully the truth to the conservative Spanish Prime Minister that what goes around

Spanish press pilloried Aznar for trying to pressure the media into blaming Basque separatists for the Madrid train bombings. Catalonian mainstream paper El Periodico wrote that Aznar called editors to implicate the Basque separatists even when clues had emerged suggesting Arabs' involvement. Journalists at the state-run news agency have demanded the resignation of their news director for swallowing the government line that the Basque separatists were behind the attacks.

The association of foreign journalists also issued a strong protest that Aznar government had deliberately misled them into thinking the bombings had been by the Basque separatists. At the instance of Spain even the UN Security Council has been embarrassed after a resolution on the day of the blasts blaming the Basque separat-

Democratic governments are elected by people. People are the supreme authority because sovereignty rests with them. Thomas

Jefferson, one of the fathers of the Declaration of American Independence wrote in that remarkable document that: "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed". Two phrases of the statement merit close attention, namely, "just powers" and "consent of the governed". "Just powers" means that powers must not be abused or misused in the name of people and "consent of the

governed" means that what

actions governments take must

have the support or mandate of the

They seem to have lost all trust and credibility in their elected leaders. The leaders believed that politics was the art of usurping democratic ideals ignoring the views of majority of their electorate.

The question is: did the leaders believe what they were publicly saying for justification of war? Former US Treasury Secretary told that President Bush was determined to wage war against Iraq from the day one of his Presidency, nine months before the dastardly September 11 attacks. Did Tony Blair believe that within 45 minutes, deadly ballistic missiles with

let us not forget that war killed thousands of Iraqi civilians including women and children. The warring nations euphemistically call it "collateral damage" of bomb-

All sensible persons condemn and abhor global terrorism and killing of innocent people. It is an irony that 90 per cent of Spanish people opposed Iraq war but many of the same very people were killed in Madrid train by terrorist attacks, just because their leader did not listen to them and as a result they

Japan and in the US among others. (except New Zealand, all these countries have sent troops to Iraq). In the US, there were protests in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco to make clear the strength of anti-war feeling in

eve of anniversary said that " the war on terrorism is an inescapable war of our generation", antagonism towards the Bush administration's foreign policy has reportedly hardened in a number of European and Muslim countries. A poll, conducted by the Washington-

Although President Bush on the

## BOTTOM LINE

It is an irony that 90 per cent of Spanish people opposed Iraq war but many of the same very people were killed in Madrid train by terrorist attacks, just because their leader did not listen to them and as a result they became victims ... Abraham Lincoln once said : " You can't fool all the people all the time." Many people have realised that their leaders have misled them and did not tell the whole truth to them. For these reasons they might behave as Spaniards did in ousting the Aznar conservative government.

It may be recalled that one year ago prior to launching war on Iraq, millions of people clustered in 600 waving placards "Not in my name" giving a simple direct message to the President of the US, the British, Spanish and Australian Prime Ministers their disapproval of war in Iraq. The cities that drew the largest crowds were in Britain, Spain and Italy and to some lesser extent in Australia that supported President Bush to attack Iraq.

Around the globe people felt that despite their loud protests, many watched their troops went to war and painfully they were aware that their elected leaders ignored their views and decided to go to war in the name of " freedom". But the British, Spanish and Australian Prime Ministers have themselves violated one of the democratic principles that they were not mandated to go to war by majority of their own people.

Where are the dangerous banned weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, many people question ? The US Investigation Group's leader Dr. David Kay, after nine months of intensive and extensive search in Iraq, found none and said 'We were all wrong". Many people knew instinctively that the causes of war were totally wrong and felt betrayed by their elected leaders.

weapons of mass destruction could be launched from Iraq? Did Aznar believe that Iraq was a threat to Spanish security? seem to be in the negative.

Then why did they do it? The probable answer lies in what Arthur Harry Ponsonby, the first Baron of Ponsonby of Shulbreds (1871-1946), (his father was the nrivate Secretary to Queen Victoria), wrote in 1928 these memorable words: " Authorities do, and indeed must, resort to this practice in order, first, to justify themselves by depicting the enemy as an undiluted criminal and second, to inflame popular passion to secure recruits. They cannot afford to tell

Was not democracy and freedom the leaders were fighting for? Was it not what they wanted in Iraq? Iraq now is in a total mess. After one year Iraqis are fearful of suicide bombings and extreme lawlessness in the country. The landscape of Baghdad has dramatically changed because all important buildings are shielded by high rise concrete walls.. One Iraqi teacher told in BBC World TV on 20th March that Iraqis felt uncomfortable with the US-led occupation and said "something hurts us inside" from the situation that her country had gone through. US soldiers die almost every day and

Jonathon Freedland of the Guardian argued that it was wrong to confuse the war on Iraq with Al-Qaeda. It was possible to oppose both war on Iraq and terrorism. Terrorism is connected with Al-Qaeda network and Iraq had no connection with this entity because Iraq under Saddam Hussein was secular. Iraq has lost now its secular character under the interim Iraqi Transitional Constitution (approved by the US) that makes it clear that Iraq will be an Islamic State. With Shi'ite ascendancy, Iraq may even follow the model of Iranian regime and if majority rule is acknowledged, the US cannot do anything about it.

Free and fearless speech is the hallmark of democracy. In Iraq under the US-led Coalition authority, some Iraqi media has been subject to censorship and even closure because they were critical of the occupation. The Qatarbased Al-Jazeera TV is no more located in Iraq. The US-led Coalition Provisional Authority wants to hear from media in Iraq that they are making good "progress" in Iraq.

On 20th March, one year since the start of the US-led invasion of Iraq, thousands of anti-war protesters took to streets in cities across the globe. It occurred in New Zealand, Australia, Britain, Spain, Italy, Thailand, South Korea,

based Pew Research Centre, before the last week's bombings in Madrid, has found public opinion overseas (in 44 countries) swinging sharply in favour of charting a course independent of Washing-

The leaders who led war find themselves cornered by their allies. The "Coalition of the Willing" seems to lose its solidarity. The most deadly blow of solidarity came from the socialist Spanish Prime Minister-designate Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero who opposed the war. He vowed to pull the 1300strong Spanish troops from Iraq by July 1<sup>st</sup> unless the UN supervised the occupation. It had an instant domino effect on other US allies..

Honduras decided to follow Spain's lead and withdraw its oldiers in June. Poland's President Kwasniewski, a close ally of President Bush of "New Europe" ( the term used by Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary for the former Communist Eastern European countries while "Old Europe" meaning France and Germany) told the media on 18<sup>th</sup> March that he felt "uncomfortable due to the fact that they were misled with the misinformation on weapons of mass destruction". It is reported that South Korea, another strong ally of the US, rejected US's request to move their troops to Kirkuk.

Obviously Washington was feeling hot by the challenge of its allies.

The US Presidential election will take place in November of this year. Democratic contender John Kerry has become a formidable challenge to President Bush. At this early stage, they are reportedly running neck-to-neck in the poll Kerry has challenged President Bush's foreign policy and criticised him for alienating America's close allies in Europe. Recently in a security and foreign policy speech in Washington Kerry said: "Every day they (US troops) face danger and death from suicide bombers, roadside bombers, and now, ironically, from the very Iraqi police they are training... What we have seen is a steady loss of lives and mounting cost in dollars with no

Australia's general election is likely to be held by the end of this year. Prime Minister John Howard (64) is being challenged by a young and dynamic leader Mark Latham (42) of the Labour Party. Howard's comfortable zone with the electorate has been gradually disappearing since Latham's election as the leader of the opposition three months ago.

Tony Blair has been increasingly facing credibility problem with large number of Britons. He thought the Hutton enquiry would put the issue of Iraq war behind but it did not. Another inquiry is being held on the failure of intelligence agencies on faulty information prior to Iraq war. Iraq war has become Tony Blair's "Achilles Heel". It is reported that he is seriously considering general election at the end of this year, 20 months ahead than the deadline for the poll to shore up Blair's beleaguered political position.

It is not unlikely that the "regime change" might catch up with these leaders for having misled their electorate on the misinformation of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Abraham Lincoln once said: "You can't fool all the people all the time." Many people have realised that their leaders have misled them and did not tell the whole truth to them. For these reasons they might behave as Spaniards did in ousting the Aznar conservative govern-

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN. Geneva.

Official policy now favours

"contracting out" health services

and encouraging private hospitals

through tax waivers, reduced

duties and subsidised land. We are

promoting "health tourism" for

# Policy alternatives to NDA: An unhealthy report card



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi N March 14 at Shimoga (Karnataka), Mr L.K. Advani "took strong objection to India being brack

with those of developed countries like the US. This assertion is obviously implausible and should be dismissed. But Mr Advani is supposed to measure his words. So let's

tries". He declared that India's

achievements are "comparable

with the developing coun

examine his claim. Going by every conceivable indicator -- health, longevity, freedom from bondage, social opportunity, gender equity, general level of popular education and culture, or citizens' rights--India belongs among the bottom fourth

In the United Nations Human Development Index, its rank is 127th (of 175 countries). It's absurd to believe, as Mr Advani's does, that India will be an "Economic Superpower" within 15 years.

In 2001, India's per capita GDP was \$462, compared to the US's \$35,277, and under one-tenth the world average (\$5,133). The \$462 compares poorly even with developing countries like Mexico (\$6,214), Malaysia (\$3,695), or South Africa (\$2,620). It is 64 percent lower than the Third World

If India's per-capita GDP grows century (2.1 percent), then it will reach only \$844 by 2030. But assume India somehow grows at the "dream" rate of 8 percent. Even

them are undernourished. Half our women are anaemic. More women die during childbirth than seven

TB annually kills half-a-million Indians--a number unchanged since Independence! Two million malaria cases are annually added to the national total of 14 million. Nearly half are potentially fatal

There's a resurgence of other communicable diseases like encephalitis, Kala-azar and denInequalities in healthcare access are worse. The poorest 20 percent of the people are six times less likely to go to a hospital than the richest fifth. Childbirth among the poor is six times less likely to be the delivery of well-off mothers. Villages have 15 times fewer hospital beds to people than cities.

The government bears only 17 ercent of India's total healtl expenditure. This is criminally low. Our health system is overwhelmingly privatised. In 1991, 57 percent of India's hospitals were

funded. Only 38 percent have all the critical staff. Only 31 percent have all the critical supplies. Only 3 percent offer abortion.

Privatisation has made healthcare unaffordable for millions. Between 1986 and 1995, the percentage of such people increased from 10 to 21 in cities, and 15 to 24 in villages.

hospitalised have to borrow money or sell assets. Over 20 million Indians are pushed into pov-

foreigners, while denying basic services to Indians! One component of this policy is deregulation of drug prices. Drugs under (reasonable) price control have decreased from 360 to just 74, and might fall to 25. With new tight patents beginning in 2005, drug prices will become unaffordable for

This grave health crisis cannot be resolved through tinkering--for example, via health insurance. We must bring the state back into health and make it accountable, as part of the larger democratic agenda. This entails a radical policy change, including making health a fundamental right.

On March 12, the Jana Swasthya Abhiyan campaign organised a dialogue in Delhi etween healthcare activists and political parties. The notable absentees were the BJP and Congress. The BJP isn't known to care for the poor. But the Congress must show it does.

It must fight for health as a fundamental right. It's not enough to say, "Congress ka Haath, Aam Aadmi ke Saath" This slogan must be translated into concrete policies. Or else, the electorate will deliver the

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

India's already-bad healthcare situation became worse under the 1990s' neoliberal policies, with further cuts in budgets, introduction of user fees, and freezing of recruitment ... This grave health crisis cannot be resolved through tinkering--for example, via health insurance. We must bring the state back into health and make it accountable, as part of the larger democratic agenda. This entails a radical policy change, including making health a fundamental

after 30 years (not 15), this would only one-eighth the US's present

In 2030, India will continue to be one of the world's unhealthiest societies -- a cesspool of disease and disability. Its under-5 infant mortality rate is an unacceptable 93 per 1,000 live-births (world average, 56). The rate of decline of mortality has slowed over the past

> Sixty percent of children's deaths are caused by entirely preventable infections and diseases like diarrhoea. We fail to provide minimum care to our most

gue. In addition, cancer claims three lakh lives, half of them tobacco-related and preventable. HIV-AIDS afflicts four million-

These terrible averages hide worse disparities. Infant mortality among the poorest 20 percent is 2½ times higher than that in the richest 20 percent.

A girl is 1½ times likelier to die than a boy before reaching her fifth birthday! Female-to-male ratios for children have rapidly declined from 945 to 927 per 1000 over a decade. Dalit women are 1½ times more likely to suffer chronic malnutrition than others. private. A decade later, 75 percent By contrast, in the UK, public

spending accounts for 85 percent health expenditure, in Latin America, 50 percent, and Southeast Asia, 40 percent-plus. Only five other countries spend less than India: Burundi, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sudan and Cambodia!

The WHO standard for public health expenditure is 5 percent of GDP. But India spends only 0.9 percent. This is just one-third the developing countries' average!

India's worst performers in health are the vital Primary Health

erty every year because of a major Private hospitals are unregu-

lated and often run by incompetent or scalpel-happy doctors and quacks. Sixtythree percent of all medical prescriptions are for unnecessary or irrational drugs. In Mumbai, 65 percent of babies born in private hospitals are delivered through Caesarean operations. (WHO norm, 10 to 15 percent.)

India's already-bad healthcare situation became worse under the 1990s' neoliberal policies, with further cuts in budgets, introduction of user fees, and freezing of recruitment

Congress another rebuff.

#### Madrid bombing prompts Japan to tighten security

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

UDDENLY in Tokyo the police has become much more visible in public places and busy railway stations. Even a few weeks ago it was only occasional patrolling policemen on bikes who were spotted by busy passer byes beyond the perimeters of what is known in Japan as 'Koban' or police boxes. Despite the fact that there is no shortage of Kobans in Tokyo, policemen in uniform were seldom seen actively patrolling outside those tiny duty boxes, except in late hours during the weekend at designated places well known for their nightlife extravaganza. As the crime rate remains one of the lowest among large cities around the world, the police force in Tokyo until very recently continued maintaining its presence invisible in many ways from the position of ordinary citizens.

The pattern didn't change even after the September 11 terrorist attack in New York as politicians and decision makers didn't think what had happened in New York could have happen in Tokyo as well. As a result, life was running perfectly normal for Tokyoites as occasional patrol police were in rare cases seen halting suspicious foreigners and checking if their documents were in proper order. This from time to time resulted in arrest and deportation of those so called unlucky 'illegal souls' who had taken the same route as those of patrolling policemen due to sheer bad luck or mere coincident. But the Madrid bombing and subsequent developments have altered the scenario radically and armed policemen have now suddenly become ubiquitous in the Japanese capital. They are seen now keeping vigil at railway stations, busy intersections and entertainment and commercial districts, anticipating the possible repetition of what has happened in Spain only a week ago.

The Metropolitan Police Department first increased the number of duty policemen at important locations in Tokyo from 50 to 200 on March 13; a day after the Spanish attack was reported The measure was a mere precautionary one as the authorities in

Japan were yet to ascertain the claim of the Spanish government about the involvement of the Basque separatist group ETA in the attack. As a result, the initial report that a group claiming to be the al-Qaida terrorist network issued a warning that Japan was vulnerable to attack for being a close ally of America was not taken seriously. The Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda told a news conference that the country had already done its utmost to guard against possible terrorist

But everything later started changing as the Spanish incident ved to be the working of terrorists linked to al-Qaida and thus bringing devastating consequences for the ruling party whom

the voters punished for trying to divert public attention from the facts. Observers were keen to see what effect the Madrid incident might have on Japan as the prime minister elect of Spain declared that the country would bring back its troops from Iraq by the end of July. They didn't have to wait long as Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said he didn't think the Madrid bombing would have any immediate impact on Japan's deployment of Self-Defence Forces troops to Iraq. He also mentioned that the situation in Ianan was different from Spain's and hinted that he would be closely monitoring the new Spanish administration's policy over

CLOSEUP JAPAN

fear that this could make their situation much more vulnerable as they risk being easily spotted and arrested.

The increased security measures at important locations of the Japanese capital have raised concern of a large group

of foreign nationals who are working in and around the metropolis without having proper documentation. They now

The position that the mission in

Iraq had been of different nature for Spain and Japan was later confirmed by high level government officials who mentioned that Japan's basic stance of providing support to humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in Iraq was not going to be affected by the result of the election in Spain. The involvement of al-Qaida in Madrid incident by then became clear and with that the government in Japan started taking the potential threat of similar attacks n Tokyo much more seriously. 450 riot police and transport police assisted by sniffing dogs trained to detect explosives have since then been put on duty at six major railway stations in Tokyo. Security is also being tightened on national railway lines, including the Shinkansen bullet trains.

The increased security measures at important locations of the Japanese capital, on the other hand, have raised concern of a large group of foreign nationals who are working in and around the metropolis without having proper documentation. They now fear that this could make their situation much more vulnerable as they risk being easily spotted and arrested. Moreover, as some official websites in Japan are running announcements urging citizens to inform the authorities of suspicious movement of foreign nationals in their localities, there is also a growing concern that the high security situation might be used as a ploy to find out and deport those who are overstaying their visas. This would no doubt satisfy Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, who for quite sometime is blaming illegal foreign nationals for the deteriorating public order and security situation of the capital.

Meanwhile, A year after the start of the US-led war against Iraq, Japanese leadership has expressed determination to keep troops in the war-shattered country despite growing fear that the terrorists might strike Japan both at home and abroad. A day before the anniversary, the Japanese prime minister told reporters that the fight against terrorism would take long and he denied that doubts over the legitimacy of the war was growing among countries that have once stood by the United States.

But whatever the prime minister says, public opinion in Japan doesn't seem to be buying the explanation the government is providing. A poll conducted by the major daily *Asahi Shimbun* earlier this month found 66 percent of the respondents said the United States had no legitimate reason to attack Iraq, while 19 percent said it

But over the issue of Japan's Self-Defence Forces in Iraq, the public opinion in the country is almost evenly divided as 42 percent of respondents supported the dispatch while 41 percent opposed it. As for reconstruction of Iraq, the principal purpose the government sighted for the dispatch of troops, only 15 percent of the respondents said progress has been made while 74 percent said they didn't see any progress. And in another front, like many

other nations around the world, Japan also saw its share of protest rallies and marches marking the first anniversary of US-led war against Iraq. Tokyo witnessed three main events organised by different groups and coalitions. But people's reluctance to join street demonstrations despite showing a strong sense of opposition and an unusually cold and rainy weekend have made the task difficult for the organisers to attract people in gatherings that have matched similar events held in many other cities around the world.