LATE S. M. ALI

**DHAKA TUESDAY OCTOBER 12, 2004** 

### PM's call for enlightened politics

Where is the blueprint?

RIME Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's address to the nation on Sunday has several facets that we would like to comment on. For the present, we confine our reaction to the most important concept she has put across to the people -- enlightened politics (alokita rajniti). We will take up the opposition leader's speech, delivered on the same day, tomorrow.

The PM's call for enlightened politics is extremely heartening, for that is what politics should be like. Just as we are enthused by the call, our upbeat spirit wilts a bit considering that she has not stated what her government needs or plans to do to facilitate enlightened politics in the country. What we heard instead was a carping criticism of the opposition delivered in a rather condescending monotone. It was bereft of any direction that people had expected her to provide for the sake of 'illuminated' politics.

That is, in our view, the crux of the problem with our politics The very approach that the fault always lies with the adversary is responsible to a great extent for the political quagmire that the nation today finds itself in. We agree that the opposition has shortcomings and limitations and the PM's recital of these is not out of context. The foremost of which was the call for toppling the government on April 30. We condemned it then, and do so again, as politics of misadventure repugnant to all democratic sensibilities. But does that mean that the government should be oblivious of its own drawbacks? There is not even the slightest hint of admission on the part of the ruling party that it has mishandled its relations with the opposition.

The people want politics of enlightenment. And the PM has rightly laid emphasis on this feeling the pulse of the nation correctly. To that extent, the PM has hit the nail on the head. We extend our full support to her agenda to bring about enlightened politics.

We can ill-afford to forget, however, that enlightened politics demands participation of the opposition as a major stakeholder in national politics. But the PM's speech did not spell out any blueprint for drawing the opposition into any meaningful interaction with the government.

The PM has put the blame for all terrorist incidents squarely on the opposition. Hasn't her own student wing engaged in gunfight from time to time in the academic arena? Wasn't there several instances of factional fighting erupting into armed clashes of her party and its front bodies? She unfortunately ignored them. We may recall here that her party's return to power was immediately followed by the abolition of the then JCD central committee. But since then there has been no more demonstration of this robust resolve to weed out criminal elements.

While we echo the PM's call for enlightened politics and fully endorse it, we urge her to see the necessity for an enlightened approach from her side as well. The effort will have to be from both sides of the aisle to make it happen. Ruling party naturally has to take a greater share of responsibility.

#### Improved law and order!

Between the sublime and the ridiculous

E find the statement of the parliamentary standing committee on home ministry that the law and order in Bangladesh has seen a marked improvement and is better than that of any time in the past, difficult to accept. The rather euphoric comment is belied by the realities on ground. Interestingly the previous committee had also felt satisfied at the state of law and order despite the facts and figures speaking to the contrary.

It seems that either the standing committee is working on a quite different set of information or its perspicacity of the truth is based on standards too sophisticated for us to fathom. Or else, their threshold of pain is so high and their ability to withstand the abysmal situation so great that render the figure of more than eleven unnatural deaths and three hundred and fifty crimes of various definitions every day on the average, a satisfactory situation.

Even to the most unsophisticated a comparison of the number of people killed in 2003 and 2004 indicates roughly an increase of almost twenty percent. Jan to June crime figures of the current year show an average daily homicide figure of more than eleven per day. Human rights group suggest that the figures are much higher than what the government statistics suggest.

Leaving aside the statistics of crime, the other determinants of a good law and order do not provide anything for the lawmakers or the people to feel ecstatic about.

We also find the committee chairman's euphoria on the state of crime in relation to the population rather extraordinary. We wonder whether they had taken the trouble of stepping out of the comfort of the parliamentary office and bothered to carry out a sample opinion survey on the current law and order before coming out with the self satisfying statement they did.

It would make sense to accept the reality and work to better the situation, rather than live in-a-make-believe world in regard to something so critically important and palpable as law and

# Gas for growth



**ABDUL BAYES** 

ANGLADESH is endowed with natural gas. Besides gas, availability of other natural resources is too limited to lean on for a future of a country embracing 130 million people where about half of the population groan under perilous poverty. Natural gas, with a net recoverable reserve of 15 trillion cubic feet and current actual consumption averaging 1.3 billion cubic feet is projected to perk at 3.8 billion by 2025 to provide most of the current and future energy consumption of the country. This impAlies a growth rate of 5.5 per cent over the period under consideration.

To maximise the role of natural gas in greasing growth (and in reducing poverty), both public and private sector agencies have to work with right earnest and hand in hand. Foreign assistance in creating infrastructure has to be sought in the light of meagre domestic resource availability. The sooner, we believe, the better it is. Unfortunately, however, the energy sector -comprising production, transmis-

sion and distribution of electricity and gas -- is, allegedly, groaning under grievous mismanagement and bad governance. This results in high system loss, low capacity utilisation and over and above, slower economic growth and erosion of competitive edge. Lack of investment funds, on the other hand, tends to hinder exploration, transmission and distribution of the energy inputs. The trend, hitherto unabated, is telling upon a country where (a) annual per capita elechigh capital intensity of exploration and transmission might have led to lukewarm attitudes towards realising its potential. However, of late, the interests of the government and donors induced a new dimension to the development of the gas sector. As we are told, Petro-Bangla is poised to provide piped gas facilities to northern-western part of the country. To this effect, half a dozen or so projects have already been tabled for foreign funding. Quite obviously, the network of transmis-

public sector investments. If government comes forward with facilities for fuels, there should not be any shortage of demand at household, enterprise or commercial levels.

Take the case of gas in particular. It gears up growth by supplying gas to power plants and fertilizer factories. Both power and fertiliser are important inputs to agricultural and industrial production. As we are informed, these two sectors absorb the largest chunk of the gas supplied. Supply of gas also helps other augment farm income through increasing gross cropped areas. Thus, land poor and landless households would benefit from employment generation. Gas supply could increase number of industries operating in a particular area or help preservation of environment by allowing a substitution from coal or wood based fuel to environ-

ment friendly natural gas. At household level, the impacts are immense. For example, it saves the time spent in collecting firewood vaccines and help surgery arrange ments (all assuming that doctors are there!)

Areas already having access to electricity or gas could benefit from uninterrupted and regular supply. One of the most important bottlenecks in industrial development is load shedding. The government has to increase generation of electricity as well as ensure regular supply. Taking gas to distant areas would enable the creation of growth centers in pockets of poverty. The expansion of the network might reduce migration to towns, as economic opportunities would be created through gas-based growth of economic activities.

One of the key indicators of underdevelopment is per capita energy consumption. Bangladesh, barring Nepal and Bhutan, is far behind other South Asian countries in terms of per capita consumption of energy. But unlike some of them, it has natural endowments of gas which, if properly placed, could inject multiplier effects and forward and backward linkages to put the economy on an even keel.

Only appropriate polices and institutional arrangements pertaining to gas sector could go a long way in greasing growth and alleviating poverty. This assumes parting with the existing institutional arrangements, say with the power sector, and devising an innovative pro-poor gas sector development strategy.

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## BENEATH THE SURFACE

Bangladesh, barring Nepal and Bhutan, is far behind other South Asian countries in terms of per capita consumption of energy. But unlike some of them, it has natural endowments of gas which, if properly placed, could inject multiplier effects and forward and backward linkages to put the economy on an even keel. Only appropriate polices and institutional arrangements pertaining to gas sector could go a long way in greasing growth and alleviating poverty.

tricity consumption is 110 kilowatt/hour, (b) one-third of the total population has access to electricity and (c) only 6 per cent of households are connected to gas facilities. It is estimated that power shortage alone reduces industrial output and GDP growth by 0.5 percentage point each year. In other words, had the growth rate been up by 0.5 percentage more, the level of poverty would have gone down by more than one percentage point each

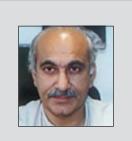
year over the decade we passed. The gas-growth nexus has rarely been realised in the past. The very

sion and distribution so proposed would warrant huge investments crossing domestic capacities. Heartening news is that, the Energy Division of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has reportedly agreed to undertake a Gas Sector Development Study in the proposed project areas to assess techno-economicenvironmental- social and institutional impacts of the projects. We are of the view that supply of gas could generate its demand rather than the other way round. We hypothesise that like the gas itself, its demand has to be explored via industries through access to gas based activities. But bear in mind, the price of gas has to be fixed economically. A subsidy to gas would mean a subsidy to fertiliser factory rather than the farmers. Likewise, a lower gas price goes to help only the richer section of the population with a fortune to have access to the fuel.

Such developments could help both agricultural and industrial growth and poverty reduction. First, availability of electric pumps would reduce cost of cultivation for the poor farmers. Second, it would devoted to other works. Empirical studies tend to show that in areas with access to electricity, children spend more hours on studies than those in areas without such access. Also women tend to work more hours at night in areas with an access to electricity. Famous economist Yujiro Hayami observed that in his sample village in the Philippines, access to electricity has direct bearing on the reduction of fertility! Gas supplies to rural areas could help health centres with lighting, freezing arrangements for

and thus allows that time to be

## An American diary



M.J. AKBAR

HE biggest tourist attraction in America now is the immigration service at the airport. It evokes the same mild dread that was once reserved for Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon. Common sense suggests that nothing will happen when you encounter them, but who can erase the faint consternation that you could be the next big story in the news? There is never any logic to an accident. Surely the most famous face on the Washington-Boston air run is that of the unmistakable Senator Edward Kennedy, and yet he has been stopped, and even denied permission to emplane, six times Thought: which computer could have possibly programmed a likely terrorist with a name like Edward Kennedy? It must be Republican black humour.)

Senator Kennedy might grin and bear it, but one can see the apprehension on the faces of anonymous browns, particularly those with unfamiliar headgear or shaped beards. There is also the fear and loathing associated with fingerprinting. For Indians it must arouse the collective consciousness of disgust for the thana level of suspicion. Nothing is more greasy than the thought of the thumb being jabbed on carbon ink by a fat police hand before it is pressed again on smudgy government paper. Why do Indian constables insist on holding the victim's hand all through the process? Middle class sensitivities are also affronted by the implicit suggestion of illiteracy. Only those who cannot sign must be fingerprinted, isn't it?

Now for the good news. The immigration service at the San Francisco International Airport is as friendly, efficient and fast as it is possible for a government service to be. The premonition of long, horrible queues turns out to be a mistaken nightmare. This might be because my flight landed at 12 in the afternoon instead of 12 at night, but the pace of clearance was brisk and standardised. Someone has been dictating from the relevant chapter of How to Win Friends and Influence People. The thumbprinting is psychologically painless, since 19th century ink has been replaced by world after Iraq is absorbed and sympathetic from both faculty and students. Raka Rav. who heads the South Asia department, has unambiquous faith in her quests: she is unfazed by the fact that the lecture has been scheduled at precisely the same time as the Edwards-Cheney debate. My ego gets a boost when I learn that there is even a gatecrasher. It is quickly deflated when I learn, upon investigation, that he has come for the free wine and cheese. I actually see him stuffing his baggy and bedraggled pockets with cheese. What I once thought was pedantic dressing-down

endless miles of flat, relentless plains can look beautiful. Apple notes that John Wavne comes from lowa, but it is entirely in character that when Wavne was in Iowa his name was Marion Morrison. However, lowa is poised to do the most exciting thing it has done in decades. It could be the decisive swing state in a close election between George Bush and John Kerry. The fate of the world could lie in the silence of Cedar Rapids.

FREDERICK Smith and Philip Lutgendorf breathe life and energy into India studies. They are known familiarly as Fredji and Philipji

film industry. The proposition is tentatively titled "The Guilt of Dilin Kumar" who was christened Yusuf Khan but was forced to adopt this nom de plume in order to become acceptable at the box office. True. even Hindu stars took on screenfriendly aliases, but they did not have to change their ethnic associations. Mehmood and Waheeda Rehman were the first important stars to retain their original names. It is a tribute to changing India that the three Khans, Aamir, Salman and

Shah Rukh, are not required to play THE secret is out. The future of



Success or failure is determined in these debates as much by what you say as what you do not say. Bush was damaged severely by his scowl in Round One of the Great Presidential Heavyweight Championship. He could lose on blinking points in Round Two. He was, generally, more assured in this round. There was a sense that if he messed up again he would be out of the count and he did enough to stay in the race. But Kerry was in command, of the facts, of the language, of the dynamics of argument. This remains an election that Kerry can't win unless Bush loses it.

domestic flights the democratisation of security is reassuring. You do not have to be a defence minister of India to take off your shoes. Everyone, white, yellow, brown or black, has to do this. A minor side-effect is that travellers have become conscious of their socks now that they are required to take off their shoes. Branded socks are in.

I have not fully recovered from the glow of my most painless journey to America in over two decades of travelling to the land of hope, glory and immigration. If the news

changes, I shall report that as well. BERKELEY is the kind of campus they make for the movies: relaxed, sunny, gentle and anti-Bush. The weather is splendid with views (both geographic and intellectual) to match. One could make a career of doing a doctorate out here, and indeed many do. This is the first leg of a three-university lecture tour. The reaction to an alternative, Washington-sceptic presentation on Muslims, South Asia and the

21st century electronic ray. On practical for minor theft, He has Fredii speaks Sanskrit like a the world may lie on a couch, John been known to walk off with a full bottle of wine stuck in his waistband.

> JOWA is the heart of America, and the heart of America is serene, silent, rural and decisive. This is the kind of archetypal mid-western state that Dave Barry ribs when he is short of a topic for his weekly humour column. It is true that you are welcomed to Cedar Rapids, home to the University of Iowa, by a massive statue of a milch cow. The pavements of the two-avenue downtown are punctuated by large plastic eagles in American football uniforms. Milk and patriotism are the passions of lowa. In a mellifluous niece this week in the New York Times, R.W. Apple reveals that the information centre on the highway linking the capital. Des Moines, with Kansas City boasts a sign proclaiming "lowa where exciting things happen" but treat that as an advertisement. It is generally believed that the liveliest movement in the state is the swaying of amber fields of corn. Trust me, that corn on

Chennai pandit, from whom he learnt his classics. Philipji recites Tulsidas like a charm. Their Hindi, needless to add, is impeccable. Philipji makes a splendid cup of chai and his listening music includes Fifties' Hindi hits as well as Dil Se. We indulge in a lengthy and passionate conversation where I deliver myself of theories on Dev Anand, Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar. Only one of them, Dev Anand, I argue, is a genuine iconoclast. Raj Kapoor weeps too quickly at the sight of mother earth, and Dilip Kumar weeps too quickly, period. We are in total agreement on Waheeda Rehman, the most glorious creation of the Almighty in the history of civilisation, with some competition from Madhubala. Philipji not only teaches medieval Indian literature but also a course on contemporary Bollywood. Later on, during my lecture, I use the excuse of a wandering question to trace the history of Indian Muslims through the confidence levels of Muslims in the Kerry's resurrection is being attributed to two reasons. He brought in some sharp Clintonians into the upper echelons of his strategy team. And they brought in Sigmund Freud. The way to George Bush Junior's jugular vein is through his dad. All you have to do to destroy Junior's composure is to praise his father, particularly on Iraq. That is what Kerry did, at judiciously spaced intervals in the first debate, now uniformly acknowledged as an unequivocal victory for Kerry. Bush Junior, also nicknamed Bush Lite, hates being told that his father showed more sense during the earlier war against Saddam Hussein. Kerry rubbed that nerve with salt, pepper and chilli: "You know the President's father did not go into Irag ... beyond Basra ... he wrote in his book, because there was no visible exit strategy. And he said our troops would be occupiers in a bitterly hostile land. That's exactly where we find ourselves today. There's a sense of American

occupation. It has been whispered that

Junior was at least partially motivated in his Iraq adventure by the desire to be one-up on his father. who defeated Saddam but refused to pay the price that destruction of Saddam demanded. That whisper has become a shout. Kerry brought up Father Bush

in the second debate as well, although Son Bush was better prepared to handle the trap. He was under strict orders not to scowl, or appear like a petulant rich kid watching his toys being taken away. But his advisers forgot to tell him not to blink. He kept blinking whenever Kerry spoke in the debate, like a faulty but obstinate neon light. His spin doctors tried some post-debate repair work. One of them told CNN, for instance, that Bush was having so much fun during this debate that he kept winking. Good try, but no goal. You can't wink with both eyes. Success or failure is deter-

mined in these debates as much by what you say as what you do not say. Bush was damaged severely by his scowl in Round One of the Great Presidential Heavyweight Championship. He could lose on blinking points in Round Two. He was, generally, more assured in this round. There was a sense that if he messed up again he would be out of the count and he did enough to stay in the race. But Kerry was in command, of the facts, of the language, of the dynamics of argument. Kerry, to return to Freud, was the son that Bush Senior might have wished to beget: patrician, patriotic, educated and balanced rather than merely gutsy, guttural and plain old lucky.

This remains an election that Kerry can't win unless Bush loses

M L Akhar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age

### TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

### Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Forest at stake So now we have the flora and fauna of Lawachhera forest at stake ....! It's amazing how the oil companies take such wanton stride, bent on to destroying anything that comes in their way. Or should we say it's the multinational motto! First it was the Occidental oil company (in 1996) that accidentally exploded during drilling in the Magurchhera area in Sylhet which later sold the holdings to Unocal without paying any compensation, to the tune of hundreds of crore taka, to the government of Bangladesh for the colossal damage done in the adjacent

Next, we heard the Shell steering the idea towards aerodynamic exploration in Block 5 in the Sundarbans vicinity but was unable to move forward and left suddenly, handing over the responsibility to their sister concern, Cairns. We are yet to see what Cairns has to propose in the future!

These multinational companies are renewing the old spirit in new formula. Yet, they are the very companies who harp on environmental conservation and ardently spend on some small conservation

programme as eyewash to convince the local people of their convictions The Unocal proposition of laving a pipeline, of 33 feet width and 2.70 kilometer length, through the Lawachhera National Park itself is preposterous and the government considering the matter sounds

In this modern era, the oil/gas companies of the respective countries play a major role in world politics. A recent news item informed of India's agreement to bring a hydrocarbon exploration in the Sundarbans area in the Indian part. However, any such work will have a ripple effect on the echo system of the Sundarbans at large.

Irrespective of party politics and party affiliation, all governments, of the past present and future of Bangladesh, have to understand that any oil or gas exploration in the reserved and national forest areas will create havoc and any accident (as one in Magurcherra) can happen. Hence. these areas need to be left untouched in the greater interest of the nation. These issues need extensive debate in the parliament and with concerned environmentalist

bodies, before any such long-term

decisions are taken. The country is already facing the ravages of climate change, which is not within our reach. whereas any further man made calamities can be avoided through proper analysis and better judg-

#### Police fail to act I saw the horrible scene on ntv that a number of people were beating three

persons who were accused of robbery. Those people were so excited that they set the suspected robbers The "gono pituni" culture is nothing

but an indication of the failure of

police. Police arrives at the spot just

after the anarchy takes place. If this

continues, public life will be badly endangered. The whole situation is just becoming like Bangla film, the police comes in the end of the movie and says the old boring dialogue "ain nijer hate tule naben na". If the cops had come to the spot earlier they could have saved the lives of those young men.

Cantara Wali Ruhi

Dept. of English, JU

#### Bomb scare

One problem that has been added to our daily life is fear of bomb

The bomb scare has already had a disrupting effect on public life. The government should act quickly to restore people's confidence in the existing law enforcement mecha-

Jefiraj Dolon Kubi Shariatpur

#### Reviving the society Many do not see how politics or the

politicians are going to solve the nation's cumulative problems, which are basically moral. The society is on the point of breaking down (if not already disintegrated), thanks to the negative political culture, which led to corruption, violence and immoral practices at different vertical and horizontal

The corrective steps have to be taken by the political regime, but how clean is it to undertake the job (including the many interactive components)? According to the leaders, there are no hidden godfathers within the political parties (or, it is always on the other side!). There

is no neutrality or impartiality in the public administration. The same type of virus is lurking everywhere. Agitation or routine schemes won't do, because most won't listen or follow the rules. The rules and rags are not infected, but its implementation at the human level. The bug is the human effect, and we not talk

touted by the political feriwallas! Bangladesh is passing through a depressing phase familiar to observers watching other new nations in other parts of the world. Proper attention is not being paid to the basic cause on the origin of armed terrorism, which the US (and white allies) are trying to fight militarily. The latter cannot provide political and religious solutions, regardless of the drum-beating on

about it. Virtual virtues are being

secularism and other totka. Today both politics and religion are at crossroads, as the leaders messed up both during the last few decades, scattered throughout the globe. It is not that the poor are more desperate and violent, or the rich are more condescending or arrogant. Disparities, specially economic, play havoc with immoral attractions, otherwise there would

not have been such huge gaps between the first and third worlds (or the North and the South).

This gap is widening, because materialism (in the guise of democracy) does not work, ultimately. The Western values of life are disintegrating, and the South is being blamed for the violent ills of social systems. No one talks about plain living and high thinking. These concepts are confined to the pages of classical books of wisdom. When the polarized goal is to grab the natural energy resources anywhere in the world. WMD means "world materialistic domi-

Some big countries tried atheist principles in governance for decades. Now we are witnessing creeping out processions out of these big black holes within these countries (some truncated already). The delayed reactions of the deprived naturally turn violent now and then, in desperation. Their captive minds are looking afresh at religion and its goals, short and long-term (religion is a message or a medium, why its ultimate appeal is so deep and intuitive?). This divine relationship is out of course

without a sense of direction (the ship of state is rudderless). It is also out of tune, needing empathy for analysis, not sympathy.

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

The global leaders should not judge on the basis of clean-shaved or bearded faces. This looks like a trite comment, but has philosophical implications. The dress may change from a style to an icon. Watch the youth prancing in the television commercials: and the press reports of installing secret mini-camera in the bathroom of female dormitory in Dhaka University. Importing culture is much easier than exporting it. What we have to offer? Ġood quality leather for shoes and bags! Ok, but we have to add to the list: concepts which appeal voluntary to the heart. Have we become so base

that we have no solid base? There is too much brain work in politics. So the spirit has become more important than the gross material. Detailed planning for whom, and what for?

The slip is showing! Empathy is self-radiating, while schemes have to be toted around with boring monotony. Give some space to others. Individuality has not disap-

peared, but it should not dominate The virtues of self-effacement need reminders. Every circle has a center. Where is the centre of the cosmos?

In these times of mental stress, the mind seeks philosophical outlets, to get it out of the system. Pressure is nowadays recognized mostly as BP (blood pressure).

Some heart beats miss, and the medical clinics are doing booming business (fall outs from the crude art of running humanity in all parts of Earth). Look at the fellows around you? What can you do for

A Mahasen Dhaka

#### In search of justice

It is about one month, but there is no news of any progress in the investigation into the bomb blast of 21 August at Bangabandhu Avenue.

There was assurance from the government that the culprits would be brought to book. But nothing has been done so far. Moazzem Hossain Dept. of English

University of Dhaka

Makeup-4, start- 4:00 finished