

for them. You can virtually trade on

everything. Why joining street

agitation -- even for rightful things -

- to be mercilessly beaten up by the

police who are well trained in it -- if

has already left for a month long

jaunt in America. Don't the politi-

cians -- who are also human

beings -- need holidays? With

that the government, always dogged by nagging opposition,

now looks relaxed. It has won

great political battle: Keeping the

opposition at bay both in the

parliament and the street over

government's handling of 21st

August, After having silenced the

nagging fuss of 8/21 the govern-

ment will now be able to treat any

conceivable problem of gover-

nance from soaring prices of the

essentials to continuing dismal

Yet the country like Bangladesh

would remain problematic and

trouble can always erupt in some

from or other. Yet by all reckoning

the alliance will find the turf smooth

both to rule and play politics --

thanks to the absence of many

Motia Chowdhurys and her likes in

redoubtable Sheikh Hasina and a

disunity of the left

internal order just as routine.

An embattled Sheikh Hasina

not in hunting down the criminals.



LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY OCTOBER 25, 2004

One more public health concern

Quacks having a field-day

survey carried out under the Health and Population Survey Programme makes a dismal reading of the state of our public health service. So much has been the erosion of people's trust that fewer and fewer people are turning to the government doctors for medical services. The affluent are seeking medicare abroad and the poor are going to the quacks. What then remains of the confidence in our health care system, public and private sector put together?

The statistics contained in the report should get the relevant people in the government thinking. As of now the percentage of people that rated government service as 'good' has come down to ten from 38 five years ago, and those resorting to quacks have gone up to 49 from 30 during the same period.

There are some cogent reasons why people are turning away from public health services and the government must urgently address the causes if it wants to arrest the decline in health delivery system.

One of the causes of poor service of public health system is the spurt of private clinics and hospitals, which attract government doctors at the expense of their primary responsibility. The doctors posted at the rural health centres including the upazillas often remain absent from their work place.

Among the developing countries, Bangladesh is credited with having very good primary healthcare infrastructure facilities. But the system has been badly let down by the mismatch between planning and implementation.

We feel that apart from improving government medicare system in terms of the quality of service the quacks also must be brought under some sort of control.

A situation where the quacks are a major provider of health care is perhaps too much to endure, even for a country like ours.

Is it compensation or insult? The very culture has not grown

N the event of an industrial worker's death or injury in the line of duty, neither any member of the bereaved family nor the wounded victim himself or herself is recompensed automatically or with any degree of certainty. Even where there is some provision for compensation, the aggrieved family has to go from pillar to post to receive the paltry sum not without a corruption premium paid, though. In fact, recompense is more of an exception than the rule.

The tale of the family of deceased sixteen year old worker Md Alam is a case in point. The lad died from a terrible accident. While working at the SR Steel Complex in Shyampur Industrial Area molten iron with temperature of 1200 to 1500 centigrade splashed on his head and rolled down to his back. An industrial court invoking an outdated compensation law -- of 1923 -- ordered the factory authority to pay his family Tk 21,000 only. The same law provides for Tk 30,000 in injury compensation, but bafflingly Tk 21,000 in death compensation. Is death a smaller misfortune than injury?

Actually, the whole concept is wrong. The allowable figure is a cruel apology for compensation and the sense to laugh occasionally at assessment of losses bears little relation to the magnitude of disaster suffered in the absence or the maiming of the only bread earner in the family. That is bad enough. But imagine the plight of the families of those who died or the ordeal of those crippled in fire accidents in garment industries and through launch or highway accidents who are seldom paid any compensation. And, we have had so many such disasters in recent years. We may be a poor country but the owners of garment factories, launches and buses, and in the case of the railways, the government are certainly not. On the contrary, they make profits, many of them sky-high.



M ABDUL HAFIZ

HE nation will take long indeed to recover from the trauma of the tragedy of

21st August last. Such traumas are however nothing new in this country which witnessed a number of brutal political killings in the past. But 8/21 surpasses each one of them in its sheer audacity with its perpetrators leaving a chilling message that they were capable of even deadlier strike. Remember that 8/21 did whatever the demolition of Twin Towers couldn't do on 9/11. It assaulted the rampart of our statehood. It wanted to wipe out the remaining few who still uphold Bangladesh of the vision of its founding father and silence their already weakened voice. No matter which quarter the assault came from it apparently targeted a critically decimated AL leadership including the party supremo.

Sheikh Hasina. So far so good. ment and opposition leaders. Still

Yet after 9/11 no other country drew so much of the outpowerings of sympathies from all over the world as did Bangladesh. Because they all considered the incident in Bangladesh no less than national disaster. A drove of visiting dignitaries, the emissaries of the foreign governments and the member of the diplomatic corpe lined up to meet and console both the govern-

Back to business as usual

But it contained so much of

lethality, bestiality, vendetta and

hatred that it defies an apt descrip-

tion of itself. Worse still is the fact

that it did not happen in a vacuum.

It occurred when a highly man-

dated BNP led alliance govern-

ment and all of its state apparatus

like security and intelligence forces

were in place. The hell was let

loose in broad daylight in clear

public view.

ment behaved responsibly and made some right noises after the tragedy -- even if briefly. But a drift could not but be visible in its behaviour. It chose to add insult upon injury by blaming the AL for the enactment of 8/21. Politics is, of course, an art of

shell shocked a deeply anguished

Sheikh Hasina acknowledged

those courtesies, the government

also received no less a share of it.

But it appeared worried. After it

could not be easy to absolve itself

of its responsibility of public safety

particularly in case of a former

prime minister who was repeatedly

ridiculed by the incumbent govern-

ment after her disclosure of threat

to her life. However the establish-

PERSPECTIVES

After having silenced the nagging fuss of 8/21 the government will now be able to treat any conceivable

problem of governance from soaring prices of the essentials to continuing dismal internal order just as

routine. Yet the country like Bangladesh would remain problematic and trouble can always erupt in some

from or other. Yet by all reckoning the alliance will find the turf smooth both to rule and play politics --

thanks to the absence of many Motia Chowdhurys and her likes in the street, a mercurial politics of

possibles when one has all the state's resources in the hand. Even then there is an elastic limit after which it carries no credibility. The

redoubtable Sheikh Hasina and a proverbial disunity of the left parties.

deep into an introspection and are able to catapult the nation of the morass

establishment did exactly that by

blaming the Awami League for the

tragedy. But can any party commit

such harakiri for its self-perdition.

No amount of conspiracy theories

When a disaster of the magni-

tude and scale of one on 8/21

occurs, what does a nation do? Its

patriotic people immediately close

the rank, build up a consensus

over what ought to be done, go

can vindicate such insanity.

A nation state has an inexhaustible capacity to retrieve itself from the deepest of the crises. In our case the first and foremost priority was to unravel the mystery and find out the truth. In other words it was to catch the perpetrators of the tragedy. Given the collective wisdom of the nation it was possible. It

government and opposition who chose to be locked up in a no-win game. It obviously resulted in the defeat of great national purpose.

Now the altitudes have stiffened on both sides only to hasten their self defeats. There is also a public the street, a mercurial politics of nonchalance and the great majority of them tend to be resigned to their fate. The clever ones will of parties. course fish in the troubled water.

was possible to nip in the bud the

rise of an invisible evil force in the

country. It is always the privilege of

the government of initiate such

in the offing as the government

showed some alacrity in the matter.

But devious forces within could

have overtaken those noble ideas

and scuttled the process. Soon

there was face-off between the

To start with, such a notion was

enterprise.

The country is now ideally suited Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

proverbial

tions

BJP: The Janata is missing



M.J. AKBAR

OLITICIANS can survive a great deal -- plague (cor-

ruption charges), pestilence (electoral defeat), famine (not made a minister) -- but very few survive a sense of humour. That may be one reason why there isn't much of it around. After all, if you want to laugh at others all the time you have to also laugh at yourself some of the time, which is difficult to reconcile with ego. There is a very thin line between cracking a joke and becoming a joke. Lalu Prasad Yaday, for instance, is now expected to entertain at every public meeting and at many private ones. He succeeds because he does have the

reasons. He overdid himself during the press conferences in the general elections. Correspondents are too polite to snicker in front of the high and mighty, but behind his back was another story. The slippage on the credibility graph was significant. This may, in the history books, end up as a very minor reason for the BJP's troubles this year, but when the going is bad everything

quaint, the combination was often because L.K. Advani struck a chord hopelessly funny for all the wrong with the poor. He did not do so with an economic agenda, but a religious one. He took the Ram temple construction movement into the villages, where the party had insufficient presence, and to women, whom the party had never wooed. The strength of an emotional upsurge can at best be limited, and much of the steam exhausted itself with the destruction of the Babri mosque. But Advani had something adds up. A more important reason else to offer his party: a rational could lie in another verbal statistic. analysis of weaknesses and Pakistan, an antithesis of the BJP, to redefine the thesis of his years in power. It was not another political game. He genuinely believed in peace with Pakistan, and sustained that belief through the Kargil war, the turmoil of terrorism and the expensive failure of Agra.

When push came to shove, as in Gujarat, the Atalites had to retreat. Power, however, provided this faction with sufficient cover, and the prospect of continued power made it complacent. Defeat has marginalised the Atalites to the point where

card, Advani, since it is trapped once again in the uncertainties of the 1980s.

The mention of the Emergency was incidental, but has a deeper relevance. The doubts of the 1980s were a direct consequence of three years of power after the Emergency, and the extraordinary compromise that the party made in 1977 when it merged its identity into the Janata Party. Three years of power led to seven years of doubt, until the mishandling of the Shah Bano crisis provided a route back to relevance.

has an obvious immediate challenge: how to energise the base that keeps slithering away. The Bharatiya Janata Party is still Bharatiya, and still a Party, but the Janata has disappeared. Politics is never static. If you do not grow, you slide; you do not

The tried and still trusted Advani

remain stagnant. The base has two dimensions, the party and the electorate, and to an extent they are interdependent. It is obvious though that a party depends more on the voter than the voter does on a party. The Modis may not believe it, but the voter is not going to return through the brutal mechanism of communal riots. The spirit of democracy dies each time a Modi thrives.

A story from a favourite source might prove instructive. Hazrat Maulana Jelaluddin Rumi is well known. But his father, Bahauddin Veled, was also a famous divine Sultan Alauddin, rule of Qonya, once took the elder sage to his palace and fortress, and showed him the splendid new roof, walls and towers that had been built to protect the kingdom. Bahauddin Veled remarked to the Sultan: "You have raised an excellent defence

Politics is never static. If you do not grow, you slide; you do not remain stagnant. The base has two dimensions, the party and the electorate, and to an extent they are interdependent. It is obvious though that a party depends more on the voter than the voter does on a party. The Modis may not believe it, but the voter is not going to return through the brutal mechanism of communal riots. The spirit of democracy dies each time a Modi thrives.

The BJP has a large research division. It should put together a team to find out just how many times the party president used the words "poverty" or "poor" and compare it to other words in his repertoire. Even a that the BJP had slipped to its Jana Sangh roots and returned to a middle class political culture.

BYLINE

strengths when opportunity presented itself at the end of the 1990s. The BJP leadership took the unsentimental view that if it wanted power in Delhi then it could only be through partnerships. This meant that it mentary calculus, and withdraw from the confrontational heart of its ideological compulsions. This was not without internal pain, for there were always the Murli Manohar Joshis to push the envelope at inconvenient moments. However, it was implicit that both concessions were temporary. Neither did the party have any qualms about exploiting crass communalism, as for instance in Gujarat.

the Maharashtra election campaign scheduled only one Vajpayee meeting, and that too in the company of Bal Thackeray. Nor is Vajpayee the only "traitor" to the hardliners. Narendra Modi has

How many years of doubt will emerge from six years of power?

The nub is this: can Advani of the 2000s be the Advani of the 1980s? Or is Narendra Modi going to be the Next Big Thing? There is little doubt mself as the futur of his party. He has positioned himself as the incorruptible soul of Hindutva, both ideologically and financially, untainted by the temptations of body, bank account or ideological compromise. He believes that he does not have to wait for more than a couple of years before the call comes. Ironically, he needs the Manmohan Singh government to last the course, so that he can campaign against both incumbency and "pseudo-secular-

minority" rule. However, windows of

opportunity in public life tend to be

flirtatious. They beckon. But a

sudden breeze can also shut them.

Events change life more than inten-

We have a strong feeling it is time the government put a comprehensive compensation policy in place through consultation with the key players in public and private sectors to give a more civilised account of ourselves.

never to joke about corruption just in case the boomerang effect gets him squarely on the nose. When a joke falls flat it takes the joker down with

himself, although he takes care

The just-removed BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, never quite got his jokes right. He fashioned an image as the bluff, hearty, alliterative leader who could demolish deathly demons with devastating daring you see the point. Bad alliteration is like the flu. You catch it easily and it lays you down. Naidu was always shooting off some homily or the other about those opposed to the BJP, and since his relationship with the English language was at best

measures assuring stable prices.

It might be of interest to the party, as it struggles once again to find a road map, that communalism and communism emerge from the same concept: commune. In theory, both communalism and communism accept the rationale of conflict. But whereas the first seeks to advance its cause through the demonisation of the minorities, the second seeks to expand its base through a challenge to the rich. This is what makes the first ephemeral and the second sustainable

The BJP rose in the late 1980s

One faction, offered shelter in the Vajpayee wing, did begin to believe after 1999 that power would diffuse the original ideology, but it was a minority (pun intended). Very adroitly, Atal Behari Vajpayee used

OPINION

president with deafening silence. It is pertinent to note that Advani is a sitting MP from the capital of Guiarat, Equations have changed in Modi's calculations. Two years ago. he needed Advani. Today, he believes that Advani needs him.

Pramod Mahajan, belligerent in victory but astute in defeat, has made a very perceptive point in one of his mea culpa interviews offered to the media as part of the atonement process. He learnt to play bridge, he says, while under arrest during the Emergency. One of the basic rules of the game is "When in doubt, lead a trump". The BJP, he explained, has pulled out its trump

ainst the hordes and horsemer of the enemy. But what protection have you built against the unseen arrows, the sighs and moans of the oppressed who live inside the kingdom? They can sweep whole worlds away to destruction. Strive to obtain the blessings of the poorest of your subjects. They are a stronghold compared to which the finest turrets and strongest castles are nothing.

Venkaiah Naidu concentrated on building castles, at least some of them in the air. Lal Krishna Advani needs to find those subiects.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

Arrest the spiraling price of essentials

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

am no longer worried about the enquiry into the bombings of August 21. I am no longer worried about the traffic iam in the capital city. I am no longer worried about the criminal acts of a section of the people who have wrongfully occupied lakes and other water bodies and have constructed some monstrous and uplv structures ringing the death bell of our environment. I am no longer worried about the law and order situation. I am no longer worried about the disastrous state of our education. I am no longer worried about the continuous miscarriage of justice and violation of human rights. I am no longer worried about the water-logging in the city and the continually deteriorating state of civic amenities. I am no longer worried nor do I care if the fly-over opening ceremony by the Honourable Prime Minister does not ever take place

The government says it is arranging the security of the members of the public during Ramadan. I no longer care. Government and the high-profile businessmen of the country are busy in assessing the feasibility of the \$2 billion investment by Tata. I could not be both-

about it. I could neither care less nor percent of whose people are Musbe worried by the ugly "faces" of our lims when the rising of prices takes politicians and their cheap and place every year during the senseless bickering. I am not wor-Ramadan and the Eid festival. Is this ried about our cricket team creating the kind of spirit of Islam we are the legacy of a champion loser! pursuing? This should alone be a I am not worried about which matter of shame for the entire intellectual belongs to which of the nation. Is this a part and parcel of two major political parties. I am not our proud heritage of so-called democratic traditions? Believe me if worried about which newspaper represents which of the political that is what it represents I do not parties. I am not worried about the wish to be a part of any such fake accident of the F-28 at the Sylhet slogans! I wonder whatever hapairport the other day. For all I care, pened to these poor and the soour Ministry of Aviation, in collusion called middle class that they too with corrupt officials and business have taken the backseat and have houses, could go ahead and buy decided to do nothing about it and more of these obsolete aircrafts, continue to suffer silently? How can and ensure more deaths and disasall these corrupt and unscrupulous ters in the future. I am not worried traders and businessmen continue about the pitiable state and the to operate year after year? I see rocketing costs of medical services. every year serious meetings are I am neither interested nor care held prior to the advent of the whether the Judiciary is separated Ramadan. High profile civil bureaucrats of various ministries and from the Executive or not.

ered in the least nor am I too excited

lawmakers come to these meetings One is thus likely to ask me as to in the comforts of luxurious Paieros what is it that I am worried about? Yes. I am right at this time extremely and Nissan Patrols and return home orried about the spiraling of prices after making tall promises and of essentials. I am worried since this concerns over 70 percent of our population belonging to the socalled middle class and the poorer section.

It is a shame for a country 87 take them to task?

> While the present regime is engaged in celebrating its three vears of success, the opposition is busy trying to bring down the government and be in the seat of power. No one ever thinks of these unfortunate people. At times I have the feeling that this country has been custom tailored for the corrupt, the rich, and the unscrupulous. The Paieros and the BMW owners are not only destined to be the king of our roads but also lead a life worthy of kings. But do they also realise that their kingdom will someday, sooner than later, crumple like a pack of cards? It is three decades since we gained our independence and yet these (the poor and the vanishing middle class) people continue to barely survive, with any visible improvements in their lifestyle year after year.

The difference between the violent deaths caused by small arms and the criminals as against choking due to rising prices is this that, this is a process in which millions will die a slow death due to hunger and malnutrition

How long shall we be held Yet nothing happens. Why should they worry when they can buy hostage in the hands of these anything and everything no matter unscrupulous traders? The govwhat the prices are? Will no one ernment will do nothing about it.

The rich and the affluent will do nothing about it. The politicians

and our lawmakers will do nothing about it. The civil society will do nothing about it. Strangest of all. the affected will also do nothing about it. I say boycott the traders, gherao the wholesalers, take out silent processions across market places in order to create a kind of awareness, both amongst the traders and the buyers at large. One can perhaps survive without high priced red meat or fancy dates or some such items, but not without rice, pulses, or such basic vegetables like aubergine. How can anyone be quiet and watch buying and selling of aubergine at Tk. 80 per kg in a country like Bangladesh? Let us for God's sake, for once at least, think of the well being of the day labourers, the rickshaw pullers, the people in the lowest bracket of fixed wages both of government and private organisations, the bricklayers, the cobblers, the laborers and the

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Is 'globalisation' a panacea?

tion -- for the lack of progress of

One may debate whether the

trade policies of the developed

countries are more or less responsi-

ble than the other reasons or equally

responsible, for the not-so-

palatable condition of the develop-

ing world. One may cite the instance

of China or Malaysia, too, to argue

that if they can prosper, why cannot

other developing countries. Without

going into the controversies, it can

be said that the developing coun-

tries are not fairly getting benefits of

It is true that while it took United

Kingdom some 60 years to double

its per capita income in the 19th

century, in a much more 'globalised'

world, countries, with population

ranging from millions to a billion,

e.g., China, Japan, and Korea,

could double their per capita income

in a decade. The share of the popu-

lation in poverty is also declining for

on widening? Why is there no

these countries.

'globalisation'.

AHBAB AZIZ

HE buzzword 'globalisation' has different meanings or connotations to different people. To me, 'globalisation' is a misnomer. Though we are living in a 'coca-colanised' world, as they say, it is still ridden by barriers of myriad nature -- some cultural, some trade related, some ethnocentric, and what not. However, what has been hurting the developing countries most, in my opinion, is the traderelated barriers.

The developed countries are not ready to concede benefits of 'protectionism in trade' to the developing countries, although this advantage contributed immensely to the economic development of nearly all the developed countries. In the name of intellectual property right also, the developed world has been obstructing progress of these countries, whereas MNCs like Phillips and Unilever, for example, still bear the legacy of gross violation of intellectual property right by the present developed countries in notso-distant past. Thus, the trade policy, followed by the developed world, has been minimising the chances, of the developing world, of reaping the advantages of globalisation. Of course, there are

many other reasons -- like poor law inverted-U relationship between and order situation, lack of growth and inequality, as suggested infrastructural facilities, and corrupby Kuznets?

Globalization' must go hand in hand with democratisation to make it, i.e., 'globalisation', worth its nomenclature. However, the reality is just the reverse. World Bank and IMF, the behemoths of global finance and trade, are not democratic in nature, as 'one country, one vote' system is not operating there. Rather, the voting rights are determined there according to the amount of donations offered by the member states, resulting in the majority of the votes in the hands of less than 10 per cent of the countries of the world. United States alone enjoys more than 15 per cent vote at the Bretton Woods institutions. The 'one dollar, one vote system of these institutions gives power highly disproportionately contrary to the core of democratic norms, to the USA, as 85 per cent vote is required to amend any fundamental policy at World Bank and IMF.

the developing countries. But, So, is it not natural that the biased inequality, between the rich and the equation of power is only accentuatpoor, is increasing. Otherwise, why ing the unjust polarisation between is the gap, between the developing the rich and the poor in the and the developed world, keeping 'globalised' world?

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boatmen in our countryside.