

# Of gangs and Bangladesh

Unlike other social (legal and legitimate) associations, political parties are not formed to serve the interests of their own members; they are formed with the avowed objective of serving the interests of the people of their country.

KHANDAKAR QUDRAT-I ELAHI

ALEXANDER the Great: "Pirate, what is your idea in infesting the sea?" The Pirate: "The same as yours in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a small craft, I'm called a pirate; because you have a mighty navy, you're called an emperor."

This dialogue took place between the Macedonian King Alexander and a captured pirate, which St. Augustine, honoured as one of the four Doctors of Western Church, quotes in his famous book, The City of God.

In 410 A.D., the Goths, members of a Germanic tribe, sacked Rome. The Pagans blamed this disaster on the emperor's conversion to Christianity. They argued that Rome remained powerful so long as Romans worshipped Jupiter. But he withdrew his favours when the emperor turned away from him and embraced Christianity.

In The City of God, St. Augustine refuted this accusation: Rome's fall to its slaves had nothing to do with the acceptance of Christianity by

the Roman emperor. This fall was caused by the city's own wickedness.

Rome was an out-and-out wicked kingdom that practised little justice; kingdoms without justice are like gangs of criminals: "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms?"

A gang, Augustine says, is a group of men under the command of a leader, bound by a compact of association, in which the plunder is divided according to an agreed convention. If this villainy wins so many recruits from the ranks of the demoralised that it acquires territory, establishes a base, captures cities, and subdues peoples, it then openly arrogates the title of kingdom, which is conferred on it in the eyes of the world, not by renouncing aggression, but by the attainment of impunity.

It's truly painful for me to use Augustine's arguments for examining the prevailing political developments in Bangladesh. Yet, my conscience has long convinced me

that the difference between "gangs" and "political parties" have significantly shrunk over the past 36 years of our independence. The recent decisions of AL and BNP concerning participation in the national dialogue have exposed this stark reality nakedly.

A gang has two features that are particularly important in the context of this article. First, an immoral man, called a godfather, depending upon his notoriety, commands a gang whose members cannot take any decision or action without the approval of or instruction from their commander.

Second, this morally mischievous male assembles similarly immoral fellows with the promise of sharing the ill-gotten incomes. Evidently, a gang is gathered mainly to serve the pecuniary interests of its members.

Political parties exist only in a democracy. Democracy, as we understand, is a political theory of governance, which is founded on the axiom that people collectively own the state. In other words, people are the owner of the state's sovereign

power and their power is vested in the institution of government.

People, being a collective entity, cannot exercise this power. They, therefore, need individuals to do this job for them. Here arises the need for political parties in a democracy. These associations identify and develop political leaders who are supposed to take up the responsibility of running the government -- the most important task in the state.

In elections, voters choose their representatives from among the candidates fielded by different political parties. This procedure also prescribes what these parties are supposed to do about the candidates who failed to get voters' approval. The failure to get elected might be interpreted as the rejection of one's candidature by voters.

This, in turn, makes these candidates ineligible for re-nomination in the coming elections. Therefore, the political parties should look for new nominees for the next elections -- a principle that is practiced in all advanced democracies.

The two features of our interest are the following. First, a political party ought to be organised and operated according to democratic principles.

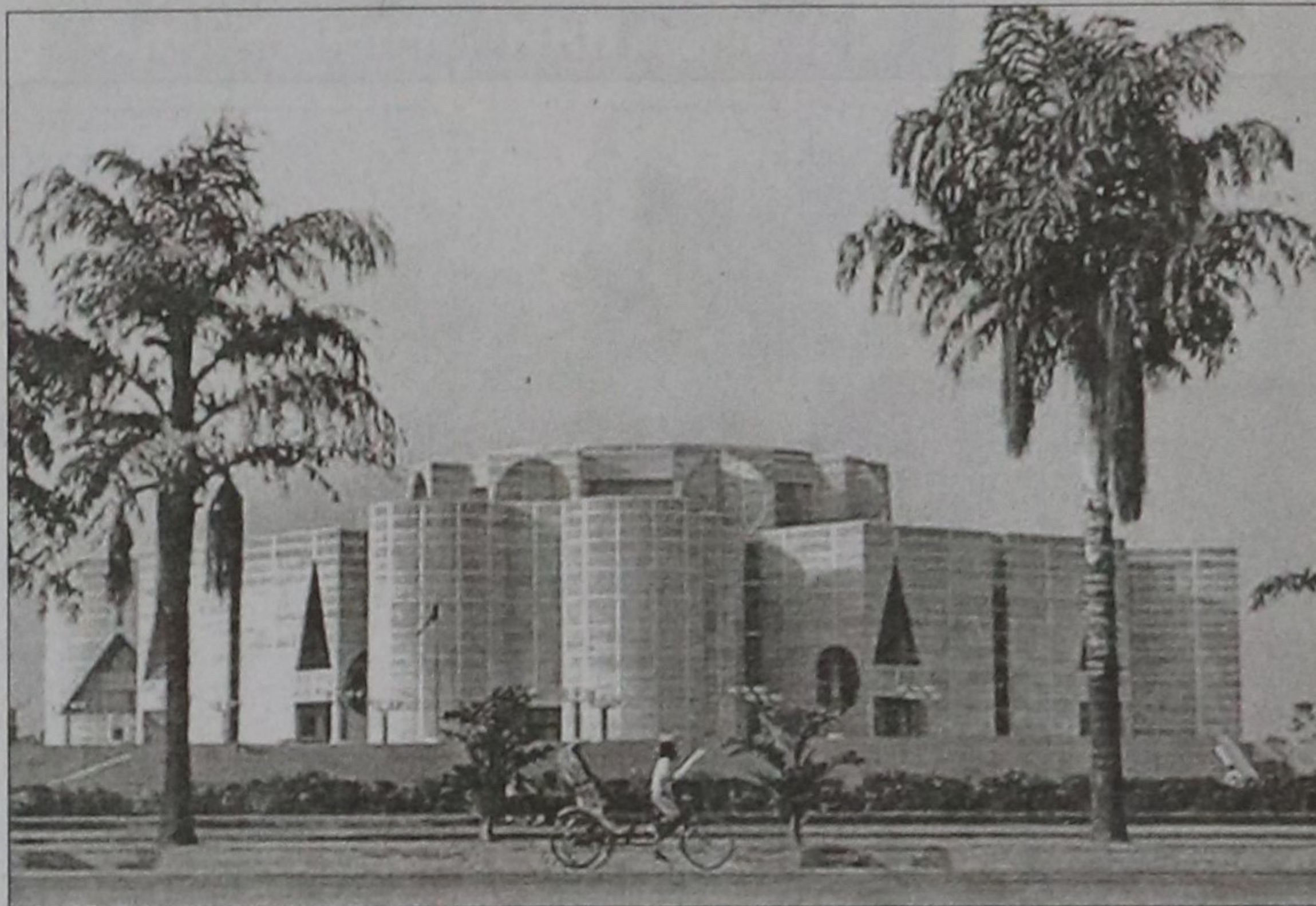
Like the state, ordinary or general members own the political party they are members of. Thus,

the central leaders should neither dictate to the party, nor matter how popular or persuasive they are, nor should the ordinary members or junior leaders subversively seek their directives or guidance. If this happens, it is an indication that the party is failing to play its relevant role in society.

Second, and I understand this as the most important feature of a political party in democracy, unlike other social (legal and legitimate) associations, political parties are not formed to serve the interests of their own members; they are formed with the avowed objective of serving the interests of the people of their country. This makes two points very clear.

Firstly, a political party does not have unqualified right to select its leaders and then nominate them in the general elections. Neither does it have unqualified right to field members in elections who have already been rejected. Secondly, a political party acts more like a gang when its leaders seek personal fortunes using public offices.

We are fully aware of the political situation in the country. We know what our political leaders did in the past and what they are doing now. We know how the 1/11 event took place. We know what types of people were running the government,



Hoping for a gang-free neighbourhood.

and their personal characteristics and commitments.

We know our main two political parties want unconditional release of their leaders so that they can resume their previous jobs. We know that a section of our civil society, public university teach-

ers, noted academicians and some media personalities support and supplement their demand.

Thus, the time has come for us to ask some fundamental questions that will determine our future, both as a nation and as individuals, for unknown years.

For whom will our political parties function -- for the people or for their leaders, or, as it is in our case, for some families?

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## Low carbon, better world

Bangladesh, as one of the badly affected countries of the world from climate change, has multiple opportunities to take heed of carbon emission for sustaining its economic growth. Compared to the world average per capita CO2 emission (4.0 metric tons per capita), our emission is low (0.2 metric tons per capita).

RONJU AHAMMAD

THERE is every reason to believe that increased concentration of atmospheric carbon emissions has already contributed a major role to the global climate changes.

Standing in such a climate

contingency, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) acknowledges that we have already commenced our mission towards carbon abatement. However, this year will bring more collaboration from every position to change our former habit and reduce carbon emission that

adversely affects human survival. In this response, they have picked a slogan for the recently concluded world environment day: "Kick the habit, towards a low carbon economy."

Different sources, namely terrestrial vegetation (i.e. plants) and oceans, balance the atmospheric carbon emission. Plants absorb carbon from the atmosphere for food production (photosynthesis). On the other hand, the ocean mixes carbon dioxide (CO2) by turbulence and converts it into carbonic acid (H2CO3), and eventually takes it into a deeper part (from the top of the ocean to 100m below) for accumulation.

But, recent evidence shows that the atmosphere has reached its highest concentration of CO2 at 387 ppm (parts per million) since the industrial revolution. Scientists also project that if our annual emission rate increases at 2.1 ppm then both plants and the ocean will not be able to absorb the extra CO2.

To defend against global warming, we need to maintain the emis-

sion limit of CO2 at 350 ppm from the previously set target at 450 ppm. Even if we start downgrading the carbon emission right now; it would take a long time to reduce the CO2 that has already been released into the atmosphere.

In the international arena, we have seen little efforts for reducing carbon emission compared to the frequently experiencing affects of climate change. Of late, the Kyoto Protocol has come up with agreements to reduce carbon emission, but to a limited extent and always constrained by the uneven interests of the countries.

Bangladesh, as one of the badly affected countries of the world from climate change, has multiple opportunities to take heed of carbon emission for sustaining its economic growth. Compared to the world average per capita CO2 emission (4.0 metric tons per capita), our emission is low (0.2 metric tons per capita). However, rapid population growth, upsurge demand of fossil fuels (natural gas, petroleum products and coal) as well as land use changes and deforestation has accelerated CO2 emission in the last decades.

So far, very limited study has been conducted in Bangladesh on carbon footprint (this is a measure of the amount of CO2 emissions that can be attributed to an organisation, product or individual). Based on different fossil fuels

burning and cement manufacturing, the World Resource Institute (WRI) estimated in 2005 that total amounts of CO2 released in Bangladesh is 29,253,000 MT.

Among different fossil fuels, petroleum products (e.g. diesel, kerosene, motor spirit etc) contribute the highest concentration (50 percent of total carbon emission) followed by natural gas (44 percent) and coal (6 percent). In addition, the burning of agriculture and forest products in rural areas contributes to CO2 emission.

However, recent study shows that use of natural gas for residences, transport and industries has increased carbon emission greatly since 1990. Natural gas is gradually replacing petroleum products to some extent. Carbon-emitting industries such as cement industries have also grown considerably in the last decade. Therefore, the present carbon emission rate would be more than previously estimated one.

This year, the lesson of the environment day comes to us for managing carbon in our everyday life. The success of carbon emission reduction may only be possible if we become careful of our lifestyle, e.g. what we eat, which home appliances we use, how we travel, etc.

At very individual level, we can

contribute to reduce carbon emission while choosing different energy-efficient products. For instance, instead of using regular light bulb, we can use energy-saving light bulbs, which will consume less energy, last long and reduce carbon emission.

While travelling we can use public transport in lieu of private cars, which will eventually decrease carbon emission. Proper inspection and maintenance of the vehicle can also reduce carbon emission. Government can provide better road network and improved traffic system to avoid jam (that also increases carbon emission). Moreover, motivational media campaign should be carried out to encourage people for using public transport or non-motorised vehicles.

We have different sizes of local and international business concerns. They need to focus on leaving low carbon footprint during their production period. They can play a great role through producing energy-efficient products and maintaining sustainability of the products (for reuse and recycle).

In Bangladesh, government and non-government organisations can work with carbon emitting industries to limit their emission and adopt better practices. Unlike developed countries, we do not have high expertise, yet we can develop cost-effective technology

for assessing carbon emission of our industries and promoting environment-friendly business policy as well as building-adaptive environmental governance through cooperation. Carbon Disclosure Project, a UK-based non-profit organisation is already providing technical support to different world leading multinational companies to assess their carbon emission as well for sustaining their business life.

A group of researchers from Imperial College, UK projected that 60 percent reduction of total carbon emissions in the world can be possible by 2050 through combination of energy efficiency, renewable sources of electricity, replacing coal and oil with lower carbon fuels such as gas, and the use of hydrogen as a fuel.

In Bangladesh, fossil fuel reserves for natural gas (10.6 TCF) and coal (2.7 billion tons) are not enough to meet our energy demand for a long time. We cannot also depend on oil import (consumption rate 91,000 barrels per day) entirely as it occupies nearly 22 percent of our export earnings and emits more carbon.

Considering these pessimistic scenarios, we need to explore the feasibility of developing renewable energy sources that would solve energy crisis and reduce carbon emission.

Bangladesh has several poten-

tials to switch over to low carbon renewable energy. Because of its geographical location and availability of solar energy, solar photovoltaic system can be enhanced for generating electricity. Grameen Shakti has provided 25,000 solar home systems in the rural areas. Nevertheless, it is very limited compared to the total demand. Considering low carbon economy and to solve energy crisis, government can provide incentives to local and international agencies as early as possible for establishing renewable energy options.

Any step towards carbon efficiency will work well if we can insure better governance and economy as well as enhance coordination at all levels of the society through building stewardship for protecting our own environment. Transforming our traditional consumptive behaviour can also smooth the journey towards a low carbon economy.

Ceasing enhanced CO2 emission may be the greatest challenge for the world society while focusing on climate change. Yet, the betterment of our common future environment depends on current rational actions on resource use that emits less CO2.

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## A sight of relief

On Tuesday night Obama was content to leave the table-top strategy 'til later and sketch out the broad terms of engagement for the fall. "The other side will come here in September and offer a very different set of policies and positions, and that is a debate I look forward to. It is a debate the American people deserve," he said.

RICHARD WOLFFE

FOR Barack Obama's team, Tuesday was a day unlike any other primary day. Gone were the normal nerves about the final results, the shared leaks of exit polls and the memories of dashed expectations in previous contests.

Since late on Monday evening, the Illinois senator's top aides had known they would secure the nomination with a bloc of superdelegates to be rolled out over the course of the coming day. But it wasn't until the elected officials and party insiders started to make their endorsements public early Tuesday afternoon that Team Obama could finally, at long last, begin to relax.

On the plane to St. Paul, Minn., the inner circle could finally savor the historic nature of the victory at hand. The man they worked for was about to become the first African-American candidate ever to top a major-party ticket. Staffers began to hug and joke. Amid the festivities, reporters asked senior strategist David Axelrod if he and his colleagues recognised the milestone they had reached.

"I think that it's going to take a

little while for it to sink in," Axelrod said. "We've been so engaged in this process day to day that it's almost surreal that we're at this moment. But I'm proud of him and proud of the country. We started off with the premise that the things that unite us as Americans are greater than the things that divide us and that we could overcome whatever barriers existed. The fact that we have, I think, says a great deal about the progress that we've made as a country, and I think also a great deal about Barack Obama. So it's an extraordinary night. We're going to celebrate tonight, and then we're going to wake up tomorrow and start all over again, because we're not in this simply to break a barrier. We're in this to try and change the country and the direction of this country."

Other aides expressed a simpler sentiment, after 16 months of travel and hand-to-hand combat with the Clintons. "Relieved," said one senior aide when asked how he felt now that the nomination was clinched. "It will be great to just focus on one thing: the general election."

That's what Obama did in his speech in St. Paul, returning to the original theme of his campaign: a

call to turn the page on the policies of the past and forge a new politics.

He was gracious about Hillary Clinton's talents, suggesting she would play an active role in helping execute the agenda of an Obama administration. "We've certainly had our differences over the last 16 months," he said. "But as someone who's shared a stage with her many times, I can tell you that what gets Hillary Clinton up in the morning -- even in the face of tough odds -- is exactly what sent her and Bill Clinton to sign up for their first campaign in Texas all those years ago; what sent her to work at the Children's Defense Fund and made her fight for health care as First Lady; what led her to the United States Senate and fueled her barrier-breaking campaign for the presidency: an unyielding desire to improve the lives of ordinary Americans, no matter how difficult the fight may be."

"And you can rest assured that when we finally win the battle for universal health care in this country, she will be central to that victory. When we transform our energy policy and lift our children out of poverty, it will be because she worked to help make it hap-

pen. Our party and our country are better off because of her, and I am a better candidate for having had the honour to compete with Hillary Rodham Clinton."

It was not always clear that things would work out this way. Hillary Clinton began the race as the heavy favourite; her staff in the early going sometimes seemed to regard Obama's mere presence in the contest as an affront.

The combat was gruelling and at times felt as if it would never end. (Indeed, even as Obama crossed the threshold in the delegate count needed to clinch the nomination and was widely declared the winner, Clinton still declined to exit the race or endorse the party's presumptive standard-bearer.)

But Obama tucked away any lingering resentments, calling for the party to come together and focus on the fall. "All of you chose to support a candidate you believe in deeply," he said. "But at the end of the day, we aren't the reason you came out and waited in lines that stretched block after block to make your voice heard. You didn't do that because of me or Senator Clinton or anyone else. You did it because you know in your hearts that at this moment -- a moment that will define a generation -- we cannot afford to keep doing what we've been doing. We owe our children a better future. We owe our country a better future. And for all those who dream of that future tonight, I say let us begin the work together. Let us unite in

common effort to chart a new course for America."

Obama took a less charitable tack in discussing John McCain, his rival in November, who is slated to accept the GOP's presidential nomination in the very same hall come September. Obama noted that McCain had served America "heroically" but added pointedly that there was little respect shown in return. "I honour that service, and I respect his many accomplishments, even if he chooses to deny mine," he said.

"There are many words to describe John McCain's attempt to pass off his embrace of George Bush's policies as bipartisan and new," Obama observed. "But change is not one of them."

The McCain campaign has been hammering at Obama in recent weeks, decrying the Democrat's stated intention to negotiate with hostile foreign leaders and faulting Obama for not having travelled to Iraq.

Obama aggressively moved to turn that argument against McCain Tuesday night. "John McCain has spent a lot of time talking about trips to Iraq in the last few weeks," Obama said. "But maybe if he spent some time taking trips to the cities and towns that have been hardest hit by this economy -- cities in Michigan, and Ohio, and right here in Minnesota -- he'd understand the kind of change that people are looking for."

Those states -- like Iowa and Pennsylvania, also shouted out in St. Paul -- are core battlegrounds; Obama knows he must win over many of Clinton's supporters in the coming months if he's to vanquish McCain there this fall. (Florida and Michigan, stars of the party's dramatic rules sessions over the last weekend, are also crucial; Obama trails McCain in both places in the most recent polls.)

As Team Obama pivots into the fall campaign, it will be focusing on states that John Kerry won in 2004 -- not least Pennsylvania, where Obama lost to Clinton but is ahead of McCain by several points.

In Michigan and Ohio, Obama's aides believe the economy will be critical in shaping voters' attitudes. In Florida, where Obama trails McCain, the campaign believes it can be very competitive very soon, with the help of high turnout among African-American voters and students, as well as younger Cuban-Americans.

The campaign also believes it can run strong out west -- in states like Oregon, Washington, Montana and Colorado -- and pick off several Southern targets such as Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia.

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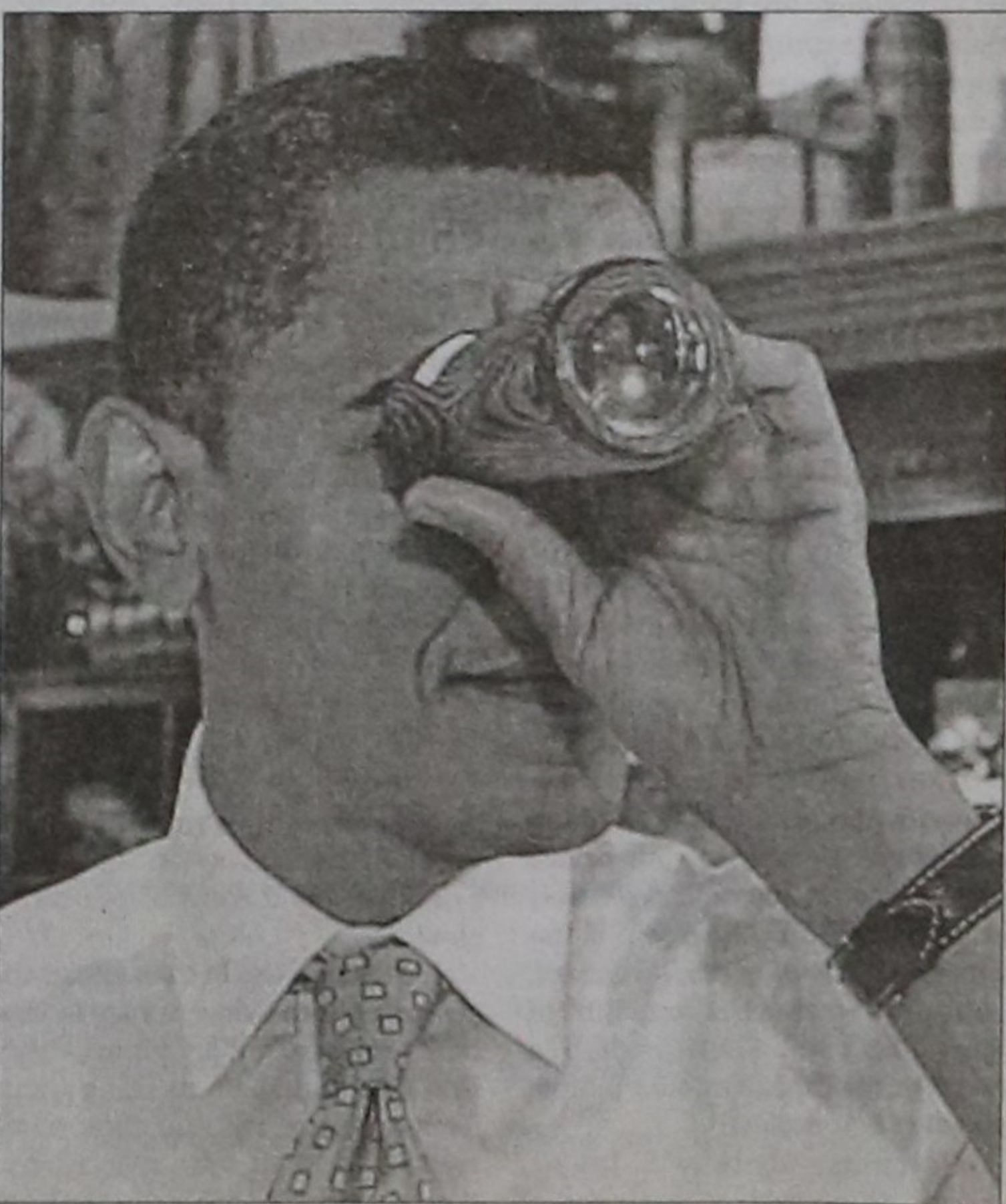
is a debate I look forward to. It is a debate the American people deserve," he said.

"But what you don't deserve is another election that's governed by fear, and innuendo, and division. What you won't hear from this campaign or this party is the kind of politics that uses religion as a wedge and patriotism as a bludgeon -- that sees our oppo-

nents not as competitors to challenge but enemies to demonise. Because we may call ourselves Democrats and Republicans, but we are Americans first. We are always Americans first."

Game on.

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Looking forward to November.