

The Verdict

The people of Bangladesh have given their verdict in the country's long-awaited fifth parliamentary election. Since, at the time of writing, no single party has won a clear majority, one may well call in a qualified one. However, when the remaining seats are filled and women members take their rightful place in the new parliament, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) will be in a strong position to govern the country without, we fervently hope, letting the country drift into instability and parliamentary confusion.

Our first job, therefore, is to offer our sincerest congratulations to Begum Khaleda Zia, the chairperson of BNP, who, for long nine years, steadfastly fought for the principles she believed in, often confounded her critics and finally came in from the cold to win her victory. From time to time, this paper differed with her tactics, like it disagreed with the position taken by the other major contender for power, the Awami League. However, even in our differences, we shared many common hopes about the future of our nation, based on a representative form of government, the rule of law and fundamental human rights for all our people, regardless of religion, caste or creed.

With the process of constitutional changes still in motion, we continue to be guided by our shared hopes for the future. The stage will be soon set for the presidential election which, unless we are gravely mistaken, may well be contested by three most well-known faces of Bangladesh politics: Begum Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina and Hussain Mohammad Ershad. What may seem like a high political drama also underscores the democratic process, a process that one of the three probable contenders — Mr. Ershad — had denied the country for long eight years. This paper would like the process to go through smoothly, without violence and recrimination.

The success of this process of transition will put the political sagacity of Begum Khaleda to a severe test. The country expects her to choose a good cabinet, whose members are experts in their own fields and, what's more, are accountable to the people, hopefully through the parliament, not just to one individual as was the case during past eight years. This means that the new administration of Begum Zia must not only avoid all the mistakes committed by the ousted Ershad administration but also be ready to learn from other systems, including the one proposed by the Awami League. No single system can answer all our problems. Our salvation may lie in the combination of several ones.

The road ahead is a long one, not just the road that completes the constitutional transition but also the one that puts the country on the way to economic recovery. The country can start this journey only with goodwill from all, not just from political parties, but from all sections of our people. As an independent newspaper, The Daily Star looks forward to being part of the process. To repeat what the paper said in its first editorial: No politician will be able to take this paper for granted, but none will be given cause to doubt our fairness.

Today, The Daily Star stands by this pledge.

A step in the right direction

The brick fields are again to use gas as fuel. This is going to be one of the best things to happen to Bangladesh in many years.

There are some two thousand brick fields in the country. A part of these were using gas in their kilns. In 1988 supply of gas to some 100 fields were discontinued on the plea that they were in arrears to the tune of about nine and a half crore Taka. After that supply of gas was altogether stopped to brick fields without any explanation whatsoever. The news story on this, please see the business page of The Daily Star of Feb 23, did not probe into the whys and the wherefores of the information possibly because the explanation of that unexpected action was all too transparent to all and sundry. The coal lobby was understandably hurt by the increasing gas connections to the brick fields. They stood clearly to gain from the gas disconnections of '88. The suspicion is that there was hefty kickbacks involved in the deal that amounted to five lakh tons of coal a year — and that not all of the main beneficiaries of the action were traditional coal importers.

Did all the brick fields thus deprived of gas fuel switch over to coal in a minute? And then after all were a handful. How were the remaining fields firing their bricks? Here lies another very tragic aspect of the story. Most kilns in most of the brick fields burn firewood most of the times. Please imagine how much wood would be required to generate the heat of five lakh tonnes of coal and more? A substantial part of our dangerously dwindling green wealth went into these kilns.

We have extensive fields and a large reserve of very high quality natural gas. Gas can be used very profitably as we shall be needed to pay only for mining and pumping and transmitting it. But this time only in a very qualified way. A petro-chemical complex adds values to gas many times its price as a fuel.

Till the time we can build for ourselves such complexes — forbiddingly expensive as they are — the best thing to do with our gas is to put it to large-scale industrial use. The decision to supply gas to brick fields is as such a step in the right direction.

GEORGE Bush likes to formulate his thoughts in the form of catchlines which his speechwriters and image makers have assured him would grab the hearts and minds of Middle America in the same way that Ronald Reagan's masterful inanities did. During his election campaign he kept talking about "A Thousand Points of Light" to persuade people to believe that voluntary groups, with the light of charity in their hearts, should take over the burden of looking after the poor and old and homeless so that the government's public assistance programs could be reduced, if not eliminated. The phrase didn't fly far. The President's devotees have established a group which calls itself the "Points of Light Foundation" but there isn't much energy or money there.

Ever since the Soviets went out of the Cold War business Mr Bush has been trying out another catch phrase: A New World Order. Ho hum. Many leaders of nations have announced various sorts of new Orders on assuming office: President Suharto of Indonesia promised an Order Baru, a New Order, when he took over from President Sukarno in the mid-sixties; President Marcos promised a New Society when he declared Martial Law in the Philippines; Rajiv Gandhi, flush from his popular election victory in 1984, promised a Modern India, free of public corruption, free from rampant poverty — all this to be achieved through resort to the miracles of modern technology and management. Familiar stuff.

That sort of political nostrum should not evoke our irascibility, but our risibility. It deserves no more than a sceptical snicker, just as the "1000 Points of Light" did. But Mr Bush's New World Order is something else. It is of a very different order of magnitude, its ramifications and implications are intricate and, despite its sound of benign concern for humanity as a whole, it is ominous rather than auspicious. Its scope is global, not national, as Kennedy's New Frontier and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society were. Its very glibness and the absence of any explanation of what it entails, hides many likely implications which could be dangerous for the whole world.

What could it mean? Any approach to answering that question must take into account the basic fact that it refers to a new American "Order" as perceived by George Bush. For 45 years the two superpowers

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

What is Bush Upto with his New World Order?

by Varindra Tarzie Vittachi
Special to the Star

carried on as though the world was composed of themselves, and the rest of us. People like Pandit Nehru who promoted a Non-Aligned Movement tried to point out that they represented most of the people of this world, and that the two superpowers were getting in the way of the rest of the world. But power is deaf in one ear and superpower is deaf in both. So neither heard this message, and wasted the Earth's treasure in an arms race which endangered the entire planet, diverting to it the material and human resources which could have resolved many of the dire problems that humanity confronts. Now that the Cold War is over, bar the barking of the hyper-con-

likely, it will not be the end of the old world order of guns and international power politics but the beginning of a new world disorder, in which the United States will continue to have the whip hand, but without the restraining influence of an equally powerful opponent.

Fifteen years ago the nations of the South proposed a New World Order intended to bridge the yawning gap between the rich and the poor worlds by instituting fairer international trading practices and increasing the order of magnitude of international assistance for rapid development of the South. A few Western countries, notably the Dutch and the Scandinavians,

"For 45 years, the two superpowers carried on as though the world was composed of themselves... Power is deaf in one ear and the superpower is deaf in both."

servative columnists who still want to see Mikhail Gorbachev as a dictator rather than as a liberator, does the New World Order offered by George Bush propose joint action by the global community to invest in a global program of alleviating poverty and its wretched fall out of disease and illiteracy rather than engaging in military spending in increasingly expensive and deadly weaponry?

It is important to recognise that the co-existence of two superpowers restrained each other from careening off into global adventures which may have endangered everyone. This balance has now been upset and new power alignments are being forged and a new world map of friends and enemies is being charted. If the war in the Gulf ends in an American victory, as seems

supported this case strongly. But then came the Lost Decade of Reaganism and Thatcherism which pooh-pooed the New Economic Order and put in its place new reactionary ideas such as "structural adjustment" which simply meant that the governments of the poor world should remove all measures such as free education, free health services and other programs for the most vulnerable people and throw their economic processes, unhampered by any "socialist" device, into the rough and tumble of the bazaar. The result of those policies is that absolute poverty has increased and the gap between rich and poor within countries as well as across the equator has widened immeasurably.

Is that the sort of international reality which the New World Order of Mr Bush wants to address? He has shown absolutely

no indication that he is even remotely concerned with abject poverty even within his country, leave alone the rest of the world. He would leave all such misericordia stuff to his points of light. Does his new Order concern itself with rejecting war as a means of solving human disputes? The disarmament process initiated by Mr Gorbachev gave promise of the new millennium being able to beat sword into ploughshares. People hoped, for a while, that the United Nations would be allowed by the big powers to play its essential peacekeeping role. Instead, what has happened is that the United States has found it a convenient instrument to legitimise its own foreign policy as it did in Korea 40 years ago, so that American generals can pursue American policy under the United Nations flag. A peace-keeping organisation going to war is an irony bordering on the lunatic.

Mr Bush's New World Order needs a new enemy. Saddam has already served the purpose of arousing the latent jingoism in the United States. It was easy to present him as the new bogeyman. But when the present unpleasantness in the sands of Arabia is over, who will turn out to be the new enemy? I would not be surprised if Mr Bush and his buddies are already dusting off an old script and rehearsing a new production in which a united and larger Germany and a powerfully resurrected Japan return to play the role of villains.

It is all very frightening and very disheartening to people like me who had begun to believe that a new world order guided by values appropriate to the new millennium to which we are heading was already waiting in the wings for new players to enact its humane message. Alas, Mr Bush's New World Order is not likely to be what we hoped for.

The writer, often regarded as the doyen of Asian journalism, has held many distinguished positions in newspaper and UN circles, starting with the editorship of the Ceylon Observer when he won the Magsaysay Award. He was then successively the co-founder of the Manila-based Press Foundation of Asia, the Chief Editor of the Hongkong based weekly paper Asian, the Director of UNFPA and Dy Director General of UNICEF. He now lives in New York, from here he will be occasionally contributing to The Daily Star.

Aristide begins to Put his Stamp on new Haiti

Kathie Klarreich writes from Port-au-Prince

Only months ago Jean-Bertrand Aristide was a left-wing priest without a parish, unpopular even with Haiti's Roman Catholic officialdom. Now, after his dramatic rise to become Haiti's first freely-elected President, he has already begun to put his mark on the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Aristide surprised everyone by sacking seven top-ranking army officers. Not so surprising was his pledge to use his high office to eliminate corruption and better the life of Haiti's poor.



JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE
"Love them, hand in hand"

A dream became reality for millions of poor Haitians as they celebrated the swearing-in of their first democratically-elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The 37-year-old priest and left-wing liberation theologian began by sacking a handful of top army officers and pledging to continue his campaign to stamp out poverty and corruption and help the country's legions of street children.

It is even rumoured that orphans from Aristide's half-way house in the capital could move into the palace with him. Aristide officially took office on February 7, five years to the day after the fall of the "Baby Doc" and "Papa Doc" Duvalier regimes that ruled Haiti with an iron fist for three decades.

Aristide won the hearts of Haitians because of his work with the grassroots church, his unrelenting criticism of Duvalierism and his promise to clean up widespread corruption.

Only months before his election, he had no parish. He had been expelled from his religious order for his radical views and lived in the half-way house he ran for children in Port-au-Prince.

After he swept the polls in December, his opponents tried several times to stop him taking power. The army had been associated with criminal acts like the 1987 election day bloodbath that left many voters dead.

But in a sign of solidarity, it was the army that provided security this time around, not just for the December elections, but in thwarting the January 6 coup attempt by the former leader of the secret police. The army arrested ringleader Roger Lafontant, a former Duvalier minister and 14 accomplices.

In his dramatic first national speech before the cheering thousands, Aristide stressed a newfound marriage between the army and the poor. He appealed to Haitians: "Please don't try to ruin this paradise. The army has arms to protect us. They will use them against the criminals. I invite you to love them, hand in hand."

In closing, Aristide surprised many by requesting that commander-in-chief Lt. General Gerard Abraham, "my brother," see to the resignation of seven high-ranking officers. They were to be replaced with officers of lower rank. Col. Raoul Cedras, head of election security, was promoted to General and number three position in the armed forces.

Representatives of 22 countries attended Aristide's inauguration, including a ten-member delegation from the United States led by Louis W. Sullivan, Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Michael Manley, Mrs. Danielle Mitterrand and the vice-presidents from Colombia and the Dominican Republic were present, alongside members from the European Community, Brazil, Panama and Cuba.

Also present at the ceremony, presided over by the President of the National Assembly, were the members of Haiti's new 100-seat congress, composed of 27 senators and 83 deputies — the body with the power to vet Aristide's choice for prime minister, bakery owner Rene Preval.

The socialist party PANPRA has moved to form a socialist block in the congress. PANPRA had been aligned with the Movement for a Democratic Haiti, whose candidate was badly defeated in the presidential elections.

It appears that Aristide's party, the National Front for Democratic Change, will join the socialist block, which would furnish a congressional majority.

There has been speculation that the congress will try to block Preval's nomination in favour of a prime minister se-

lected by the congress itself. Aristide replaces Ertha Pascal-Trouillot, a former Supreme Court judge, who took office as interim president in the run-up to the elections.

After less than one day in office, Aristide's prosecuting attorney published a law prohibiting 134 former government employees, as well as 26 people associated with the January 6 coup attempt, from leaving the country. In the list was Trouillot herself, her minister and their general directors. Aristide had previously accused members of the Trouillot government of padding their pockets before leaving office.

Aristide has set the tone for a general housecleaning. If the army colonels retire peacefully, Aristide may eliminate one potential threat. He must still deal with the opposition, hidden in every sector of society. Only days before his inauguration, the youth home formerly run by Aristide went up in flames, killing four young people.

The incident was a ghastly reminder of the attack in 1988 on Aristide's church. More than a dozen people died and the building was set on fire. Three months later, Aristide was expelled from his Sakelian order for preaching class politics.

The new government also faces a severe economic crisis. The coffers are virtually empty. Many government employees have not been paid for months. Public services like the electric company, the flour mill and the cement factory are being supported by the central bank. The national telephone company has sent the state a bill for \$25 million.

Haiti has been promised economic aid from Venezuela, Canada and the United Nations. Aristide was the first Haitian president to be invited to France, where he saw President Francois Mitterrand and other French officials. After the United States, France is Haiti's second largest benefactor.

Responding to the economic disaster, Aristide has already pledged not to accept his presidential salary. — GEMINI NEWS

KATHIE KLARREICH is a US journalist who contributes widely to the North American media as well as the San Francisco-based Global Exchange Programme.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Tribute to Bengali

Sir, Although your entire "Ekushey" supplement made for gratifying reading, I especially found myself responding to some of the sentiments expressed by Ms. S. Bari's "Living Tribute," in itself a tribute to Bengali and to the man who made his children learn their mother tongue.

I can't say my childhood experience was quite the same. English was the language I had to learn and English was what I used to communicate with my mother, aunt and uncle. My Bengali came in small morsels from neighbours because all my friends at school spoke English and Urdu. After a year in England when I was five, I even sported a British accent for a while.

Our school was split down the middle into

English and Bengali medium sections and we English-medium kids made sure everyone knew which medium we were in. As for an alphabet other than English, we were first introduced, in Class 7, to the intricate squiggles of the Arabic script used for Urdu and permitted, a year later, to switch to Bengali.

Today, while admitting that I owe my professional achievements to my English, I deeply regret not having someone also educate me in my own language. Surely if it could happen to someone far isolated from the language, like out by the Alps, it could easily have happened here.

Ironically, however, the truth is that I drew nearer to Bengali culture in the two decades that I spent abroad even though I had to hunt far and wide for

Tagore songs or books in Bengali. Perhaps distance makes the heart grow fonder. And perhaps there are others out there (not just the foreign-service-brats) yearning for material that will plant and nurture the seed of Bengali culture in their midst.

Surely a not-for-profit body can be set up, even a private group, to provide such a service to Bengalis through our embassies and consulates abroad. Or am I "hoping" for too much?

Zahid Iqbal
R-104 H-6, Gulshan.

Planting trees

Sir, Once upon a time, Dhaka was a city full of trees and long stretches of greenery. But that is all a matter of past now.

Indiscriminate felling of trees to make roads or even to create space for car parking, in places like for instance in front of the New Market, has led to this situation. It may have created some convenience for the municipality, but in the process not only has the city lost its natural beauty, but looks bare and is now filled with dust. And the

majority who have to walk down the streets, are taxed with more scorching heat of summer sun. The decision makers should first have thought about the environmental problem, before taking such an action.

This cutting of trees, in many ways has affected the climate of our country; I am not just talking about Dhaka only, but also about other parts of the country.

We can improve this condition, by further planting more trees and not cutting them for whatever reasons it may be.

Jakir Khan
Jhikatala, Dhaka.

Civilian casualty in war

Sir, No one is in favour of war, for whatever compelling reasons it might be. The warring parties are usually those few who decide to take this path, without thinking of what the final outcome or consequences will be, for the non-partisan others.

It indeed becomes a tragedy when the victims are children and women. Children when they die

because of war is a more grave tragedy, than a war itself.

Children are innocent, they have nothing to do with any side or country wanting to have a major fight over some issue or the other. But when these innocent souls are made victims of the war, it is most unfortunate. No human being in their proper sense would want the death of children, I am sure. Can't the humankind in a majority decision persuade or, if necessary, compel those opting for war to refrain from the devastating path, even after witnessing the hellish act in the Gulf?

Tahmina Samad
Tophkana Road, Dhaka.

Sonargaon Hotel

Sir, Much deserved appreciation for quality service of Sonargaon — country's only Five-Star Hotel of Pan Pacific Chain — has been received at International Tourism Fair in Madrid this year. The International Award for Tourism, Hotel and

Catering industry is one of the best honours the hospitality sector of the country has achieved so far illuminating the courtly treats and lively entertainments in the Bangladeshi ambience.

Noticeably, fast maturing service of the best rated hotel has cosmetically enriched the glamour of the country's guest business in a span of only 10 years. In an LDC like Bangladesh, where abundance characterizes social life, the prospects of posh hotel trade are not as bleak as may seem to be even with economic-political instability coupled with frequent natural calamities inflicting financial disaster through interrupted tourist influx.

Added programmes' national and international — featuring novelties as often as feasible, in collaboration with other partner enterprises, will earn profits and prestige for Bangalee hospitality.

M. Rahman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh 2200