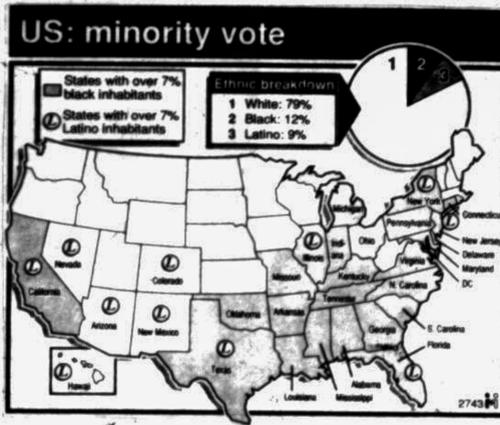


Blacks could Tip Balance in White House Race

Kevin J. Kelley writes from Washington

As election campaigning in the US gets more feverish, Republicans and Democrats are wooing America's black and Hispanic voters. A larger number of leaders from these communities are in the fray. When the new Congress convenes up to 60 black and Hispanic-Americans could be in the House of Representatives. The growing electoral power of blacks and Latinos could mean they hold the balance in some crucial votes.



development grows out of a 1965 law that made it easier—and less dangerous—for African-Americans to exercise their right to vote.

Until then, black people in the US, particularly in the South, were routinely denied access to the ballot box, despite the abolition of slavery a century earlier.

The rate of black participation in elections has always lagged behind that of whites, but the gap began to narrow following enactment of the Voting Rights Act 27 years ago.

Amendments to the Voting Rights Act in 1982 set the stage for an increase in black representation in the House to a proportion more closely resembling the percentage of blacks in the US population.

According to 1990 census, blacks account for slightly more the 12 per cent of the 260 million US citizens. If the forecasts are accurate, blacks will hold about nine per cent of House seats next year.

The changes in the Act encouraged the creation of more congressional districts with a majority of black or Latino residents.

In drawing new boundaries to reflect population shifts, the map-makers were mandated to enhance the voting power of racial minorities wherever possible. Nearly all the added African and Hispani-American

EVEN if George Bush manages to win re-election as president, the November 3 voting may well nudge United States government policies somewhat to the left.

This is because the growing electoral power of blacks and Latinos will almost certainly produce a significant change in the political and ethnic composition of the House of Representatives.

When the new Congress convenes in January, its 435 members could include as many as 60 African and Hispanic Americans.

At present, 26 blacks and 10 Latinos hold seats in the lower chamber. The latest polls also indicate that a black may be elected to the 100-member Senate for the first time in several years. Carol Mosely Braun, a Democrat with a comfortable lead in the state of Illinois, would also be the first black woman ever elected to the upper chamber on Capitol Hill.

Combined with an expected increase in the number of Democratic senators—from 57 to 60 or more it looks as though Congress will become a more progressive body.

Thus, if Bush wins another term, his Republican allies may find it much harder to sustain his vetoes of Democratic-sponsored legislation. And if Democrat Bill Clinton holds on to his current lead to election day, the new president will enjoy a partnership with a Congress eager to reverse the course followed during the Reagan-Bush years.

The projected expansion of the House's black membership from 26 to 39 may prove especially significant.

While Latino ranks are believed likely almost to double—from 10 representatives now to 19 in January—the African-American bloc will not only be

much larger but also more uniformly left-wing. The Latino caucus has not been as liberal on some social issues, such as abortion rights, as has the black delegation. And because nearly half the likely newcomers to the black caucus are women, the African-American grouping in the House will probably be even more ardent than at present in its support of feminist and anti-war causes.

Black influence will be further accentuated next year if, as expected, the number of white Democrat in the House drops.

Due mainly to the redrawing of congressional districts after the 1990 census,

Republicans may win an extra 20 House seats in November. Such an outcome will still leave them in the minority, but Democratic strength could diminish from nearly 270 to about 250.

Blacks would then account for roughly 16 per cent of the majority party's membership in the House, against under 10 per cent today.

The growth of black power "will make a tremendous difference," says Donald Payne, a current member of the Congressional Black Caucus. "With additional members, the caucus will be more effective. We will hold the balance on some crucial votes."

This potentially historic de-

four years ago." In that election, about 85 per cent of African-American voters favoured Democrat Michael Dukakis. The Clinton campaign is doing little to spark black interest, notes Bositis, who works at the Washington-based Joint Centre for Political Studies, the country's leading political think tank.

A strong turnout on the part of African-Americans would instead be attributable to "all that's happening in the realm of black politics this year," he believes.

Bositis says blacks are well aware of Clinton's decision to pursue the votes of white Democrats who supported Ronald Reagan and George Bush in previous elections.

Although they do not necessarily approve of this strategy, blacks realise, Bositis maintains, that it requires Clinton to remain "somewhat aloof from black leaders and black communities."

Until quiet recently, for example, the Democratic presidential nominees carried on an arm-length relationship with Jesse Jackson, still the most popular political figure in black America.

Jackson and Clinton have begun to make joint appearances, and the civil rights activist promises to work hard to defeat Bush. Many observers remain sceptical about Jackson's and Clinton's intentions in regard to one another and to their respective constituencies.

Clinton needs to assemble a bi-racial coalition to prevail in November, but this endeavour is being jeopardised as he seeks to assuage white fears by not associating too closely with blacks.

KEVIN J. KELLEY is Editor of international affairs journal Toward Freedom.

Toxic Fertilizer

There is a lot to learn from the recent fiasco in the import and distribution of toxic fertilizer in Bangladesh. Lack of detailed specification, sloppy follow-up by Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and the agricultural ministry and, finally, the failure to take immediate action on a timely warning by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the USA have led to the possibility of exposing our farmers to about 1200 tons of contaminated fertilizers leading to unnecessary health hazards. Thanks to a series of investigative reports by this newspaper, and in some others, the government was made aware of the public concern, resulting in the supplier being asked to take back the contaminated fertilizer and refund the money.

Ours was one of the rare cases when warning was received well ahead of time, courtesy the EPA of the US, through the US Embassy in Dhaka. The warning came while the ship was yet to reach our port. To the credit of BADC, it arranged for samples to be collected while the ship was still in the outer anchorage and sent them to its research wing (BARI) and the Atomic Energy Commission for analysis. It is the role of BARI at this stage that created the complications. While confirming the findings of the EPA of the US, it said that the presence of the toxic ingredients — in this instance high level of lead and zinc — was not of a level that could be construed as hazardous. On the basis of this report BADC decided to allow the distribution of the toxic fertilizers. In the meantime, the US Embassy sent a second report based on the sample taken at the same time as BARI's that confirmed the previous findings. This second report from the US generated local newspaper reports, which resulted in the latest action of asking the supplier to take back the fertilizer.

Now the question is why did BARI recommend the clearance of the high lead and high zinc contaminated fertilizer? With what regulatory standard was it comparing its findings? More importantly, is there any regulatory standard at all in Bangladesh against which imports, like fertilizer, can be judged? Then again why did the BADC decide to release the consignment on the basis of only one test, and that also of the BARI alone?

The Atomic Energy Commission, the other body which investigated the contaminated fertilizer, found the presence of high level of lead and zinc. The agriculture ministry was curiously silent during this whole episode. Why didn't the ministry seek further information from the EPA or the US Embassy?

The incident reveals the extreme vulnerability of a developing country like Bangladesh, which is often used as a dumping ground for the toxic waste of the developing world. Imagine that the US based EPA did not inform us. Or that the manufacturer was able to escape detection at that end — as they are often able to do. Then from our end we would have used the whole consignment. This raises the related question of the need to develop our own ability of protecting ourselves through tough and clear regulatory measures and building institutions that can provide the scientific know-how to back the decisions of such bodies. It is to be mentioned here that all companies associated with this consignment have been indicted by a US Grand Jury with the notable exception of the supplier who sold the product to Bangladesh.

The US government was able to trace the origin of this product and punish all those whom it considered implicated in this matter. We must also build our own reliable capability to check on all such imports — and there are many — to be able to protect ourselves from such hazardous products.

No to Savimbi

Angola, the mineral-rich south-west African state which went through a 16-year long bloody civil war since gaining independence from Portugal on Nov 11, 1976, is dangerously close to slipping back into chaos again. The civil war, which cost an estimated 350,000 lives, ended late last year after the left-wing Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the South Africa-backed right-wing group led by Dr Jonas Savimbi, agreed to a ceasefire and multi-party elections. The elections, held last week and monitored by 800 observers nominated by the United Nations, were supposed to usher in a new era of stability, democracy and prosperity for this strategically important nation. Unfortunately, the bitterness generated by the war, during which Cuban soldiers fought on behalf of MPLA against UNITA's South African allies, seems to be making acceptance of the results of the poll a tough job for the losers.

With more than 85 per cent of the votes already counted, according to news agency reports published in the press Tuesday, the MPLA looks set for a convincing victory with 56 per cent of the votes, against UNITA's 32 per cent, in the presidential race. MPLA's Eduardo dos Santos also leads his UNITA rival Savimbi by 53 to 38 per cent. With defeat at the ballot box staring them in the face, something they managed to avoid on the battlefield for many years with help from South African artillery and aircraft, UNITA leaders are threatening to derail the whole process of normalisation. Savimbi has already withdrawn his troops from the joint command of the Angolan army, thus raising the spectre of civil war once again, and demanded a "review" of the poll results, claiming widespread rigging.

Savimbi's negative reaction and threats have come at a time when the prospects for Angola to move ahead look realistic, particularly with the Americans seemingly prepared to work with any government that is chosen at the polls. Indeed, the US has already asked the disappointed UNITA chief to accept the results in a statesman-like manner, not least because neutral, foreign observers have unofficially declared the polls to have been fair. Savimbi may think that his destructive potential, having no doubt huge amounts of arms stored away in his southern strongholds, can make life difficult for an elected MPLA government. But with the people's verdict having been given in a clear-cut manner, we can hope that the world community and particularly the US would try hard to knock some sense into Savimbi's head, or drive home the point that he would not receive any assistance from any quarters if he decided to go back to the bush to revive the war.

SAARC—a Dimension in the New World Order

by M Rashid Ahmed

The member states of SAARC having an identical historic-socio-cultural background with diverse national entities and often conflicting interests, need to forge unity amongst their one billion people in the new world order.

THE South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been bestowed with a new dimension in the prospective advancement of the concept. Although the perceptual concept has been materialised in a protocol basis in 1985 with its first summit in Dhaka, the presently concluded summit of the leaders of the opposition, of the member countries has at least paved the way into a new vista for regional cooperation.

The South Asian region comprising of seven independent states is entangled in a cobweb of differences, disbelief and inter-national conflicts. Bangladesh, as an initiator of the regional concept, has the moral and ethical perception of initiating it as 'it never ever has to bear the blame of being an oppressor. It may be both for its meek and backward socio-political-cultural and military stance as well as the morality of the people being contented with

even the meagre means of sustenance.

The erstwhile Bengal, comprising a quasi-sovereign entity, never had the occasion of self-rule for a long thousand years. The historic emergence of independent Bangladesh in 1971 gave the much required political authority and a launching ground for nation building as well as elevating a mediocre leadership to the helm of the affairs in politics, administration, education, trade, science, defence and other realms of affairs. But sadly, the natural usurpers did not recognise their root nor evolve any system to cope up with the newly entrusted responsibilities. Thus unable to set its own house into order, Bangladesh could not come up to the expectation to instil dy-

namism in the forum.

The member states of SAARC having an identical historic-socio-cultural background with diverse national entities and often conflicting interests, need to forge unity amongst their one billion people in the new world order.

This unity so long has been restricted to government protocols and ornamental communication. The conference of SAARC opposition leaders is a welcome break in this stalemate. But the truth lies in the inadequateness and ineptness in the political parties to run the affairs of their own nations. Political parties are mandatory in the running of the statecraft but not themselves are enough for it. It is due to historical reasons and not to be taken as

a blame. So other social forces have to be accommodated in the politico-administrative system. The corollary is that political parties alone cannot ensure unity of the one billion people of South Asia. Although there is no denial of the pivotal role of the respective governments of a member state including its opposition.

Without any exception all the member states of SAARC are having their own internal strife centering on communal disharmony, ethnic conflicts, economic disparity, social injustice and the demon of ignorance and anti-scientific attitude. To these is added the colonial politico-administrative system. The fight against poverty, illiteracy, hunger, ignorance are more of illusion than reality. The inter-state

conflicts often triggered to military actions and in cases covert support to insurgency in a neighbouring country threatens the very fragile basis of cooperation.

Unless the member states themselves reckon their problems and go ahead for solutions instead of seeking scapegoats, regional cooperation will remain a far cry. Each has to face own problems with clear political conviction, truthfulness and courage. All socio-economic groups, nationalities and ethnic minorities and all strata of the society are to be clearly understood, recognised and included in the running of the state and its policy making, and also enacting of law. This participatory concept demands new political tech-

nology to bring in its fold all divergent interests and groups as a unified process of nation building and progress. This will in turn create the urge for and reality of cooperation among the member states in the field of education, science, technology, health care, trade and commerce, even defence. This will also require a common system of education based on human values, scientific approach, modernism. No system of yesteryears can serve the need of the present day.

The long time nation of individually leading a region should give way to participatory leadership by all member states of SAARC. Its acceptance is difficult but it seems to be the only way of a viable leadership with respect to individual states independence and sovereignty, dispelling all unwelcome apprehensions. This may have the way for the people of South Asia to enter the twenty-first century with dignity and honour.

New Links to Change Asia's Geopolitics

by Chai Shikuan writes from Beijing

By the end of 1992, South Korea will be China's fourth largest trading partner, next only to Hong Kong, the United States and Japan

THE establishment of diplomatic ties between China and South Korea August 24 brought jubilation to Beijing and Seoul but frustration and anger to Taipei, and, to a lesser extent, to Pyongyang.

The move will greatly boost Sino-Korean relations in various areas, particularly in trade and economic cooperation. Taipei, as if stabbed in the back, angrily announced its decision to sever its decades-old "diplomatic ties" with Seoul.

No response has been heard from North Korea, a close friend of China for many decades. Observers in Beijing believe that prior to the opening of formal ties with South Korea, Chinese leaders must

have "briefed" or explained the case to North Korean President Kim Il Sung. It seems that President Kim, unhappy as he was, at least partially accepted the explanation and decided not to spoil the China-South Korea "marriage".

It might not be too difficult for President Kim to get on this line. Old enemies as they used to be, South and North Korea have taken a number of significant moves in recent years to relax the tensions and improve their bilateral relations. This included the signing of a non-aggression pact and their simultaneous membership in the United Nations.

As both Koreas are trying to make friends with each other, why not China as well?

Actually, China has been patient in opening formal ties with South Korea. Many expected China to make the move in 1991 when both Koreas joined the UN. China chose to wait longer probably because it believes that its acceptance of a new friend

should not be at the expense of the old one.

In comparison, South Korea seems to have been more eager. It approached China for years with the proposal of formal ties.

The establishment of diplomatic ties with South Korea will have great impact on the geopolitics of northeast

Asia. Beijing analysts predict that China will adopt a "balanced policy" towards both Koreas and will encourage the two sides to iron out any differences themselves.

The new diplomatic ties between China and South Korea have provided a solid foundation for the development of bilateral relations — various fields, which have been continuing on a non-governmental basis.

Trade, which stood at US \$5.8 billion in 1991, is expected to top US \$8 billion or even US \$10 billion by the end of 1992. By then, South Korea

will be China's fourth largest trading partner, next only to Hong Kong, the United States and Japan.

South Korea's investment in China last year jumped to US \$130 million, quadrupling that in 1990. The economies of the two countries are highly complementary, as China has a vast market while South Korea has huge funds.

Both sides ambitious plans to further expand trade and economic cooperation. The Investment Protection Agreement, signed in May by non-governmental institutions in the two countries, will be upgraded into a governmental accord. The two countries are expected to sign air and sea transportation agreements before long. —Depthviews Asia

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.

City of smoke

Sir, Dhaka was called the 'City of Mosques'. But people now also call Dhaka the 'City of Smoke'. The government has not taken any steps to curb the air pollution by motor vehicles. Each and every vehicle emits smoke these days. Sometimes the smoke is so dense that visibility is obscured. Everyone knows the amount of harm done by the presence of smoke in the air. Yet not one is least bothered. The press is usually very sharp to narrate such pollution. But yet the mass-media as a whole has been ignoring the ill effects.

The government has, at times, chalk up a traffic week programme. This in no way helps to eradicate the smoke problem. There should be a

constant watch on vehicles so that they do not emit smoke.

I hope that the relevant authorities realise that the deadly smoke is not only choking them but at the same time their children are exposed to the hazard.

Michael Gomes, Dhaka

FP workers

Sir, The much-discussed about problem of Family Planning field workers is that they suffer a lot for not getting their salary on any fixed date. The house rent that sometimes exceeds Tk 1,000/- is being cut from the receivable whether a worker uses the government quarter or not. More, extra 5% to 7% is also cut from their salary. No rule

Journalists

Sir, Recently a newsman at a seminar on "Newspapers, Journalists and Readers" held at Jahangirnagar University, observed that the journalists face serious problems in performing their duties including pressure from the newspaper owners, hawkers as well as the readers.

Well, I endorse the above observation but with a little disagreement as far as the case of the readers is concerned. The interest of the newspaper-owners, hawkers, are purely commercial, often vested as well, but the common readers' interest is totally non-commercial. The common readers, no matter of what sections or

political beliefs, always wish to find true news in the newspapers. It greatly shocks and also misguides them when they find different newspapers projecting a single news item from different angles sometimes emphasizing respective political reservations. It is, of course, a fact that most of the newspapers, mainly by the will and wish of the owners' groups, maintain certain blocks or 'isms'. This cannot ensure objectivity in journalism.

We would honestly request the journalists to strictly follow the ethics of objective journalism even under pressure and hardship.

M Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka.

Vanity and glorification

Sir, The over-publicity and official patronage accorded to the teenage students who stand first to tenth in the SSC/HSC and other academic examinations may be careful-

reviewed for psychological adverse implications, not only on the youth, but also on other sections of the society.

Vanity and glorification over material success in life is neither advocated by any religion, nor encouraged by any moral law.

The humility of the winner has to match the humility of the humble. The society has some responsibility to protect the innocent and budding minds for getting spotted through undue attention. There are other ways of encouraging the young minds. A ray of light cannot be confined, and will ultimately lead out. It will attract attention even without any publicity, through its intrinsic value.

Competitiveness is not necessarily a goal of life, except in capitalism, which is a man-made doctrine of politics, now under serious scrutiny after the collapse of other-isms. The great minds never sought publicity; they were sought out of their plain living and high thinking. I urge upon my school-going son to treat his successes

more casually. That is the least consideration he can show to the others; because all his life he has to live with these 'others'.

To the meek belongs the kingdom.

Alif Zahar, Dhaka

Bosnian Muslims

Sir, Observing the news of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the newspapers, we were losing faith in the United Nations. We even called for arming besieged Muslim community of Bosnia to check Serbian aggression. All Muslim countries should take a bold step to apply heavy pressure on United Nations Security Council for ensuring armed intervention, whenever necessary, to stop genocide in Bosnia. Superpowers should intervene as they did in Kuwait during aggression of Iraq and stop the aggression.

Mohammad Naim Iqbal, Mohammadpur, Dhaka