

Kuwait Elections

Eightyone thousand eligible male voters of Kuwait gave nearly 35 of the available 50 parliamentary seats to the so-called opposition group. It is not the first time that Kuwait, one of the more moderate of Arab States, held an election. The last one held about six years ago was arbitrarily annulled by the Amir, resulting into the formation of the present opposition group which has been awarded what can be called a landslide victory. Election, in the sense that we have it here, is a rarity in the Arab world. What is rarer still is that an election brings into power a group that is even remotely in the opposition to the Amir and his group. The election result, therefore, is a sure sign that democracy is taking root in this desert Kingdom. In that sense the impact of this electoral verdict is indeed difficult to underestimate. The ripple effect of this exercise in adult franchise is bound to catch the imagination of citizens of other Arab countries whose long-standing demand for representative government is well known.

As the first government by the so-called opposition in a country still ruled by hereditary Amirs, the tasks before it will be enormous. It must, first of all, act in the most responsible manner without, so-to-speak, "rocking the boat" too much. It will have to prove to the present establishment that a representative government and a hereditary monarchy can co-exist if the ground rules are well laid out and mutually respected. The new government must not appear anti-monarchy resulting in the type of panic reaction as there was, six years ago. The Amir and his family, on the other hand, must wake up to the reality that the days of absolute monarchy are long past and the demand for representative government is too strong for any force to stop — for any length of time. In this regard a mention should be made of the reforms that have been recently introduced by King Fahd in the most conservative of Arab countries — Saudi Arabia. The reforms there add a welcome momentum to the winds of change that is definitely blowing through the kingdoms of the region.

On the agenda of the new government, financial accountability is likely to be a prominent one. Years of free-wheeling spending by the government and officials has built up a huge debt for the country. A thorough investigation of the financial dealings of the past governments will send the right signals to other oil rich countries of the region that the wealth that they waste belong to the people and as such should be accounted for. Following on the agenda of financial accountability, the elected government must look into the ways to enfranchise the women voters. The fundamental political right of franchise must be given to the Kuwaiti women, as well as the women of the region.

We hope that the new representative government of Kuwait will not move too fast so as to destabilise the situation, nor move too slow so as to dampen the aspirations of the people for more democracy and individual rights. A fine balance will set the stage for durable change throughout the region.

All-round Conspiracy against Education

Note books flood markets despite government ban. That is a headline appearing in Thursday's Daily Star. The news item below is datelined Narail. But that the situation as indicated in the headline is true of all Bangladesh, is common knowledge. This stinking note-book business is a nuisance all right but it has been overtaken by very many rackets of far longer dimension and power of harm. So much so that note books have almost ceased to be an issue of any substance. In fact, the Narail news, rather than becoming concerned, pleads for a removal of the ban on note books, paving the way for possible arrival of more responsible publication of such material than what is being purveyed in the clandestine manner. The correspondent is all for "good" note books whereas under present ban only the bad ones rule the market. He or she has completely missed the point against note books. The idea behind banning note books was to make the students read the texts and prepare their own notes, if that is at all necessary, in preparation of the exams.

Ban or no ban, the students are not going for the text books. They, about all of them, wait readymade answers to questions that are sure to be asked in the examination hall. Where can they get those? The note books in the market are only one source out of three of these readymade answers that are there to be committed to memory and transcribed on to the answer scripts — or easier done, to be copied outright on the self-made blank papers. The other two sources are more dangerous than the recognised bad character — note book. First, the 'notes' dictated by the teacher or copied from sheets, the pedagogue passes for 'notes'. This teacher, there are all the chances in the world, will give worse stuff to the students than would the maligned notebooks. The second source of notes is the successful students. The sheets handed down along generations of students from the wonder-working "first division" or "star" boy or girl is the students' own device of having a go at one-up-manship with the teacher. Which is commendable by itself no doubt, but yielding the same awful harvest only two steps removed from the original compiler. The reader is advised to read "readymade answers to set questions", wherever the word 'notes' occur above.

This all boils down to an all round, almost fool-proof, conspiracy, from inside the gardens of Akademe as well as outside of these, against education. How did we come to such a pass? Education has for far too long a time been the preserve of the mediocre and men and women even below it. If this applies more to educational administrators and organisers, the linchpin of actual teaching has also been invaded by the same malaise way back in the British times. With material returns coming at low parameters, it was too much for the profession when the customary dignity and respect that it carried started wearing thin. If education today is all guide books and coaching courses and tutorial homes and pre-cadet schools, the teachers must own up the original crimes in the matter and not pass the buck on to the gullible students only too ready to yield to the compulsion of accepting private lessons from their school teacher — the note-giving teacher.

THE Greeks claim to have invented democracy, the British to have perfected it, and it has become one of the European Community's (EC) most prized exports to neighbours in Eastern Europe and Africa. But for European leaders intent on creating a common European home democracy is proving to be a complex matter. Recent events have left European politicians scratching their heads as to how to bring the EC closer to the European citizen.

French voters decided to throw in their lot with European unity on September 20 and said Oui in a nationwide referendum to a treaty designed to fuse economically and politically the 12 nations of the European Community. But enthusiasm for greater European integration in post-Cold War Europe is waning with only a razor slim 51.05 per cent majority of French voters casting their ballot in favour of the sweeping EC constitutional changes.

French President Francois Mitterrand called the referendum after EC plans for more integration were thrown into crisis last June by an unexpected rejection in a Danish referendum of the Maastricht Treaty agreed six months earlier by EC leaders. He took a major political risk. If France has said Non, the whole idea would have had to be scrapped. The French vote in favour of Maastricht doesn't mean the treaty is safe, said EC Commissioner Karel Van Miert. "We have a lot of explaining to do to people as to what we are all about."

Britain, forced to withdraw the pound from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ECM), a system for stabilising currencies and the precursor to economic union, has yet to ratify the treaty.

Although Britain does not plan a referendum, there is stiff opposition to the treaty on both sides of the House of Commons, and the debate, which threatens to split the ruling Conservative Party, is likely to last for weeks.

British ratification is not the only hurdle that Maastricht has to face. Denmark will have to hold a second referendum, to try to extract a Yes vote from the Danes. Under its own terms, the Maastricht Treaty can become operational only if the parliaments of all 12 national signatories have ratified

THE MESS OF MAASTRICHT

Despite French Yes European Union Remains a Distant Dream

Hilary Clarke writes from Brussels

The recent turmoil in European currencies has put into question the future of the Maastricht Treaty. The treaty was designed to fuse economically and politically the 12 nations of the European Community. But despite a Yes vote in the French referendum hopes of founding a common European home are waning. Gemini News Service looks at the dilemma faced by European leaders.



The aims of the Maastricht Treaty, named after the Dutch town where it was sealed, are to create a single currency and a single independent bank for Europe, and to have a common European foreign policy. Governments would find it harder to pursue policies at odds with the rest of the EC, like Britain's unilateral decision in 1990 to scrap sanctions against South Africa. French citizens living, for example, in Belgium would gain the right to vote in local and European parliament elections. The European Parliament, currently little more than a talking shop, would be granted wide-ranging powers of veto. The European Commission, which drafts EC legislation, would be able to propose guidelines on issues as far ranging as transport networks, consumer protection, industrial innovation and new technology. The reasons given by the No voters in France, traditionally the driving force behind European integration, were as numerous as French cheeses. Bakers told the French press they feared European standardisation, as in the framework of the EC's separate single market programme, would mean an end to the French baguette. French farmers, recently engaged in violent demonstrations against the long-awaited agricultural policy, voted Non en masse for that reason, even

though the word "agriculture" does not feature in the voluminous Maastricht text. Some voted Non because they did not like the President and others because they did not like the Germans.

Most people voted against what the media has dubbed the "faceless bureaucrats in Brussels," although European civil servants at the EC's headquarters are less numerous than those of a medium-sized French city, and generally far more accessible.

According to opinion polls carried out by French television, only 13 per cent of the no-voters gave disagreement with the content of the treaty as their primary reason for voting No.

The fact is, containing words as it does like "convergence," "competence," "cohesion" and "subsidiarity" you would have to be an international lawyer with a doctorate in macro-economics to make sense of the hefty volumes of Maastricht.

What politicians and the 6000-odd journalists accredited to the EC institutions, the largest press corps in the world, have just discovered is the average EC citizen does not understand even the basic functioning of the EC. Headlines like Brussels Bans the British Sausage make good copy, even if it is not true. The question of Europe is also dividing traditional allies and creating unlikely bed fellows like the neo-fascist French National Front party and the Communists.

The French vote untypically united workers in the country's industrial heartlands and farmers in the rural areas who opposed Maastricht while white-collar workers, intellectuals and businessmen in the cities voted Yes.

The most consistent supporters of Maastricht are the business community, anxious for a single currency to save on exchange rate costs and mainstream politicians. Jacques Delors, the current Commission President, has instructed his officials to draw up concrete proposals as to how to warm the heart and minds of EC citizens to the EC in time for an emergency summit on the EC's dilemma in London in mid-October.

He is in favour of greater "subsidiarity" — the notion only previously used by Catholic theologians, of devolving more power to national authorities. In other words, only give Brussels powers to do what national governments cannot.

For one former journalist with the London Times, now a spokesman for the commission, "the problem is people haven't studied their history. The history of the European Community has always lurched for crisis to crisis but always in one direction — towards integration. Maybe the whole of Europe needs to go back to school."

"Europe will be run by the money markets, international lawyers and technocrats and no one will understand what is going on. Democracy is dead," said Wim, a Brussels taxi driver, who with a Flemish father and a Wallonian mother in this linguistically and ethnically divided city has impeccable unionist credentials. According to Peter Ludlow, director of the Centre for European Policy Studies, the solution to Europe's problems perhaps is a US-style constitution, transparent and accessible to everyone.

With most of Europe's politicians insisting there will be no renegotiation of the hard-won Maastricht Treaty until the EC's next constitutional review due in 1996, even to get a Yes vote from the Danes, this remains a pipe dream.

What is certain, Europe's politicians will have to find a way out of the Maastricht muddle, or face a drifting apart after 40 years of moving closer together. And with Yugoslavia less than two hours by plane from Brussels, the consequences of this happening could be serious.

Opinion polls show if a referendum was held the German people, desperate to hold on to their greatest asset, the deutschmark, would say No. Anti-European campaigners would argue no one elected Bangemann, who as one of the 17-member European Commission college shares responsibility for drafting EC legislation and then brokering its adoption by EC national governments, negotiating international trade agreements and drafting the EC budget and setting priorities.

But the Commission alone cannot make decision at the EC. These, including the contents of the Maastricht Treaty, are decided by closed-doors intergovernmental meeting in

the form of the Council of Ministers where EC member states are represented at ministerial level. The European Parliament is elected by European-wide universal suffrage, but it has no power.

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HILARY CLARKE is a freelance journalist based in Brussels.

Let there be a Referendum on Students' Politics

by M Aminul Islam

THE environment of education is sharply deteriorating in the country. Along with other reasons, campus violence is obviously destroying education, the backbone of the nation. As a result, a whole generation is being crippled and darkness is looming large over the future of Bangladesh.

Two main sections of population who suffer the most due to the situation are the students and their guardians. It is the life of a student which is being affected directly and most severely. The guardians, most of whom are poor and who spend their hard-earned money on their dependents to make them educated and to see them established in life, are also the direct victims of the cruel circumstances.

Terrorism is simply devastating the academic atmosphere. On the one hand, it is

leaving many youths dead or maimed; on the other it is spoiling valuable years of the students and obliterating their future. The single most important reason behind terrorism is the students' politics, as it stands, linked up with the national political parties. Now the question arises if the students should have any say regarding students' politics and the right to give verdict regarding their own lives.

Guardians send their wards to educational institutions with great hope and aspiration. But soon afterwards, they literally start to pass sleepless nights in great anxiety for their dependents out there on the campus which so frequently turns into a battle ground. Despair and frustration are befalling them. Their financial losses are multiplying over the years. I wish to ask the nation if these guardians should have right to

voice their opinion about what happens on the campus.

The political parties in the country have direct link with the students' organizations on the campus. And its true the former try to consolidate their strength by using the latter. The fight between students' organizations is the reflection of conflict and competition among the political parties. Similarly an intra-organizational fight of the students is also the outcome of the internal conflict in a political party. And in these fights, sophisticated fire-arms are being used indiscriminately.

The dangerous situation on the campus and ever-growing session jam are prompting many rich and fortunate guardians to send their dependents to foreign countries, some times at an early stage of

their educational career. The staggering number of such students has already exceeded one hundred thousand and is still increasing at an alarming pace. Alarming because they will grow up as an opportunist class and will one day come back to take the helm of affairs of the country, because there must prevail a vacuum then. As they are trained up with a tender age in an alien environment and culture and as they would nurture altogether different ideas, let there be no doubt that there will be every possibility of receiving a blow on the pride and independence of this nation. I do not know how many political leaders have their sons living on these boiling campuses here, facing curse of session jam and taking the risk of being killed or maimed for life.

It is easy for a student to enter a gang, but it is very difficult for him to get out of it. I believe, there are many so-called terrorists on the campus who, although willing, cannot give up arms for fear of their opponents retaining that. If the armed boys are to be disarmed, it should be done simultaneously, swiftly and decisively. Unfortunately, the situation can be compared to a boat having a leak through which water rushes in and one only tries in vain to empty it. Once arms are removed, in all probability they return the hands of the terrorists again. However big talks be up in the air, the terrorists do belong to students' organizations. These students' organizations are connected with the political parties. Can the political parties spell out clearly why they need their students' wings? Even if I consider from a nar-

row point of view, I do not find any justification vis-a-vis the broader interest of the nation. Be that as it may, even if there is an elemental gain, political parties must not rest on the shoulder of the students.

We all talk of democracy and there is no disagreement regarding that in our country. In that case, why cannot there be a referendum on the students' politics in its present form? There should be held a referendum among the students of colleges and universities and also among their guardians. There is no reason why the fate of these people will be played upon by others. Let them have an opportunity to give their verdict and take the responsibility of their own lives.

Dr M Aminul Islam is Associate Professor, Department of Physics, Rajshahi University.

Big Three's Domination of UN Condemned

Tjitske Lingsma writes from Amsterdam

A Dutch analyst has accused the US, UK and France of using the UN Security Council to revive their colonial ambitions.

Waart, being too preoccupied by their own internal troubles.

It seems as if there is a charter of the Security Council and not a charter of the United Nations.

In August the Security Council adopted a resolution on the situation in Yugoslavia, paving the way for military assistance of humanitarian aid in Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

My biggest fear at the moment is that at the instigation of France, Great Britain and especially the US the word

"force" within the UN is no longer a dirty word.

It is perilous for the UN since the organisation was funded to ban and prevent violence and not to become an involved party in conflicts, said de Waart, who adds that the Yugoslav resolution was left deliberately vague to suit the big three on the Council.

These resolutions are not based on UN means. The UN is dependent on nations who have some spare soldiers hanging around in barracks and willing to go to Yugoslavia. But

there is no UN budget for it. The military options under consideration by planners in the three countries include exclusion zones that may require the deployment of as many as 60,000 troops — yet so far Britain has pledged just 1,800 men and France 1,100.

De Waart argues that such operations should be the responsibility of a permanent UN peacekeeping force — planned when the UN was established but which never came into existence.

A UN peacekeeping force should be permanently available. It does not have to be stationed in New York barracks but from time to time these different troops should train together and should be well organised under a good

command structure.

Then there is at least an instrument financed by the nations and of which these states know it can be applied against them," said de Waart, putting the size of that force at 20,000 to 25,000 military men and women.

But, said de Waart, "if you want an effective organisation it needs financial and other support. That has never happened."

De Waart refers to the UN's annual budget of \$2 billion, which he says is far too limited. The situation is aggravated, he said, by the failure of countries like the US to pay all their contribution. You cannot organise the world five cent," he said. Third World Network Features/IPS

Tjitske Lingsma is a correspondent for Inter Press Service, with whose permission this article is reprinted.

To the Editor...

Super consumerism

Sir, Recently, there was a news item which said that a rickshawpuller picked up a couple as his passengers near the Baitul Mokarram market. The couple were carrying a medium sized colour TV set. This rickshawpuller gathered from the conversation of the couple. It suddenly flashed in his mind, that a day earlier, he had seen a fleeing snatcher, who exactly looked like his male passenger. When the rickshaw came near a police box, the rickshawpuller got down from his rickshaw on a pretext, and quickly said something to the two policemen who were on duty. The snatcher was nabbed.

This incident is an indication

where our society has moved into. We are trying to beat one another, in our mad rush towards super consumerism. This has led us away from a life of simplicity, clean living and mental peace, to that of an unbridled lust for showy things. We must have those 'gadgets' which the others have, by means fair or foul, and it is often the latter. This is a situation, which concerns all of us.

Shahabuddin Mahabub Dhanmandi R/A Dhaka

Father Timm replies

Sir, Ms Quader in her letter of 1 October in The Daily Star refers to my application (under three regimes) for citizenship.

She asks how I look at Bangladeshis. Obviously, I would not ask for citizenship unless I loved the country and its people and wanted to share my life with them until the end of my life.

Ms Quader sensibly remarks: "It is in the best of Bangladeshi traditions to look for precedents." One precedent is India, where over 800 foreign missionaries have been granted citizenship. (Just two months ago an American Jesuit who worked in India for 40 years was given citizenship.)

An even better precedent is Indonesia (the world's largest Muslim nation), where every foreign missionary has the option of citizenship after five years' work in the country.

Finally in reply to Ms Quader's comment that I will always be a missionary — in my 40 years in Bangladesh I have never worked in a "mission". I have always been a social worker (in education, disaster relief, development and human rights). Furthermore the Second Vatican Council stated that every Christian is a missionary by nature, so I am no different than Christian Bangladeshi citizens in this regard.

Father Timm Justice and Peace Commission

Importance of Armed Forces

Sir, The Indian journalist, and your columnist, Mr. Kuldip

Nayar wrote from New Delhi on last September 1 on his recent visit to Bangladesh. Writing about the importance of armed forces in Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's political government he claimed that there were five retired lieutenant generals in her cabinet. He wrote, "but five of her cabinet ministers are retired lieutenant generals. Her kitchen cabinet has a few more." Mr Kuldip Nayar, I submit, is factually wrong. Indeed, there is no lieutenant general, retired or active, in Begum Zia's cabinet.

There are five retired military officers in the present Bangladesh cabinet and they are a major general, brigadier, a colonel, a lieutenant colonel

and a major. Of them the first four had joined the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) many years ago and each had suffered imprisonment in the hands of the Ershad regime for their political activities or positions. I do not know who are the members of Begum Zia's kitchen cabinet, if there is one, but I can say that out of the three Bangladeshi retired lieutenant generals who are alive only one Mir Shawkat Ali, is in BNP. Of the rest two, Lieutenant General Ershad, who heads the Jatiya Party, is now serving time in prison, and Lieutenant General Atiq is living a quiet life.

Atas Samad Nayapattan, Dhaka