

US Goes to the Polls

As the United States goes to the presidential polls today, one hears the saying echoed again and again. "There is no perfect choice, but let there be a clear workable one." It reflects the mood prevailing in one of the greatest democracies in the world, one of cynicism about the incumbent president, George Bush as well as of uncertainty about his principal contender, Governor Bill Clinton. If the choice is a tough one, there are also doubts in public minds as to who would serve the country better, a well-tryed but an uninspiring Bush or a relatively inexperienced Clinton who claims to be "about tomorrow".

This was perhaps the scenario when the campaign had got off the ground, but it acquired a new visibility during the final week, with the Republican candidate reducing the wide gap in what he had once called the "crazy" opinion polls with the Democratic challenger. Then, in the unfolding drama, there is the independent candidate, Ross Perot, a sure loser, who, at one stage, gets as much as 20 per cent in one opinion poll. One only hopes that, notwithstanding the unpredictable nature of the campaign, the race will produce a sure winner who will tackle the formidable challenges facing the United States — and indeed the world — with understanding, far-sightedness and a clear agenda.

By now, it is obvious that neither of the two major candidates has offered solutions to these formidable challenges, ranging from health care to budget deficit, which has captured the imagination of the average US voter. Again, with no ideological differences providing the dividing line between the two sets of solutions, as would have been the case in the parliamentary election in most European countries, it has been all a question as to which programme may work better. And, then, at one stage it all boils down to the issue of character of the candidate, his credibility and, to put it more plainly, how much trust he can generate among his people. In a country where the history of presidencies has been marred by Watergate, Iran-Contra scandal and other devious activities, it is not surprising that the average US voter should view a candidate even of the stature of Bush or Clinton with suspicion, often forgetting that occupants of White House have also included many great presidents.

The US voters will be looking at their choice of the next president primarily from the perspective of the country's domestic problems. The world outside will be pondering other issues which concern Washington's place on the international scene. However, there is one common link between the two perspectives — the hope for a new vision. A vision means a great deal more than just an agenda, an approach or even a package of neat solutions. It combines several elements, such as idealism, commitment to values and even a touch of charisma. It is something that the late Jack Kennedy had offered to the United States — and the world. If people in the United States look for a revival of such a vision, however elusive it may be, the world outside, including developing nations, would also like to see Washington play a role that is both inspiring and dynamic, one that is based on a sense of collective responsibility with its allies and friends.

We all live in a difficult world, a world in which formidable problems defy easy clear-cut solutions. No matter who wins the race to the White House today, we should be working together to make the world a better place to live in — for all of us.

Bangladesh-West Bengal Co-operation

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the visiting Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) and the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce (MCCI) is indeed a positive development and therefore should unreservedly be welcomed. With the signing of this memorandum, both West Bengal and Bangladesh — geographically and otherwise so close to each other — are going to have a fair share of exchange of information on trade and investment climate in their respective areas. A good opening, this will however need to be used as a launching pad for exploring the whole gamut of economic co-operation.

So far the signs are quite encouraging. The several rounds of talks held between the two sides have reportedly gone very well. It is also understood that a move to set up a permanent machinery for regular consultation between MCCI and BCCI is already there. One hopes such consultations will help evolve ways to identify the needs and address, quite significantly, the problems afflicting relations between India and Bangladesh. It is good to know that the two sides have expressed their readiness, rather in unambiguous terms, to explore all avenues to expand the area of co-operation with time.

The issue of joint venture now seems to be a distinct possibility. But much will depend on the selection of areas for this purpose. When co-operation is intense and close, there is hardly any option other than expanding export and import between West Bengal and Bangladesh. This will definitely call for conducting trades in local currencies instead of doing the same using up the hard-earned foreign currency. But they must move by stages to involve newer areas for joint venture. The fact that the visiting delegation has expressed its willingness to offer expertise in the area of milk, a commodity too dear to afford here, certainly augurs well.

Similarly, several areas can be identified for joint venture for mutual benefit. But the success of such collaborative efforts will largely depend on the relocation of certain industries based on local potential and demand both at home and abroad. Again, this has to be ably complemented by joint research on certain commodities like jute, leather, ceramic, textile etc — areas where the problems and prospects alike are identical. The horizon of co-operation may even be broadened in the area of exploring markets abroad and promotion of the items produced by both sides together or independently. However, in case of products produced through joint venture, this is a must — specially when commodities will be export-oriented.

Last but not the least, the joint ventures will, in the ultimate analysis, help reduce the existing trade imbalance between India and Bangladesh as well as eliminate the smuggling now giving a real hard time to the governments of both countries, Bangladesh and West Bengal in particular.

An octogenarian, internationally known, widely respected and deeply loved in Pakistan as well as Bangladesh, is creating rather big waves in the Pakistani press these days. Even the devastating floods which reminded veteran journalists of similar almost annual calamities in the then East Pakistan, the story of the Operation Midnight Jackals, the political crisis in Sindh, could not keep this story out of the first pages of the newspapers in all the major cities of the country.

Although the story is a little old, it created renewed interest by the recent midnight arrest of the old gentleman. On 30 September he was woken up from his sleep at about 1 am by a man in civilian dress who claimed to be a military captain. He was accompanied by two truckloads of armed police. The old gentleman was asked to come with them. The destination was not disclosed but he was taken to a police station nearby. He was detained there for a few hours and later released.

It was not a new experience for the old man who had just recently suffered two heart attacks. Once before too he had been similarly arrested and released.

In a country where midnight knocks on doors are nothing new, the story of the arrest and release of this gentleman created a stir because the personality involved was none other than Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan of the Comilla Rural Development Academy (now BARD — Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development) and Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) fame.

In a letter to a newspaper, Dr Khan said that a former employee of the OPP who had been dismissed on charges of embezzlement could be behind the inexplicable harassment. He feels that the discharged employee may have told the army people that he (Dr Khan) might be absconding from two cases of blasphemy pending in Karachi and Sahiwal.

The puzzle why the police or the army acted in this manner still remains unravelled. The army or any other government agency has neither

A Legendary Figure Comes under Attack of Fundamentalists

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

Religious parties and personalities ganged up against him. His liberal views on Islam bothered them. They could not believe their eyes when they saw women working side by side with men in Orangi; they could not also believe their ears when they heard loudspeakers there urged women to practise family planning ...

Thus the veteran, selfless and dedicated social worker is being haunted for the last four years by death threats, imprisonment and legal proceedings.

Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan



denied nor confirmed the story, let alone explain it.

For the benefit of the younger readers of the Star, a brief introduction of the man whose Kafkaesque story is being unfolded now, would not be out of place.

Mr Akhtar Hameed Khan was an ICS officer when he was one was really a matter of status, and he had got there on sheer merit and not by any political influence. Before entering the service he had studied literature and history in Cambridge.

He served most of his official life in Bengal and then in East Pakistan. Many people in Barisal and Myrmensting where he served for long periods should still remember the official who ruled like a good king but walked a beggar among the people.

The Bengal famine of 1943 and the callousness of the colonial rulers deeply affected him. In 1945, he left the prestigious service to serve the people. It is said that when he resigned, the astonished English Governor of Bengal asked Khan why he was doing it. Khan's reply is said to be: "So long I have served you, but now I want to serve God." In reply, the Governor could only

say, "Well I cannot compete with him". It is a story often repeated but it could well be true. For it conforms to the character of Akhtar Hameed Khan. He is an outspoken man. And also a deeply religious one. The last trait apparently has caused all the trouble.

But on that later. After leaving the ICS, Akhtar Hameed Khan became (literally) an itinerant locksmith, obviously in an attempt to declass himself. He then went to Deoband for lessons in classical Islam. From there he was picked up by Dr Zakir Hussain, later to become India's Vice-President, for the faculty of his Jamia Millia.

On partition, he came to Karachi and from there went to East Pakistan — to become the principal of the Victoria College in Comilla. And this is where his interest in rural development truly evolved. He started the famous Academy in Comilla. In course of time, the Academy expanded to the whole of the province and carried the name of the country, the institution and its founder to four corners of the world. Comilla became internationally known and several prestigious American universities ran courses on the Comilla

Experiment. He was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award of the Philippines, the Sitara-e-Pakistan and several other international awards.

After the break-up of Pakistan, Mr Akhtar Hameed Khan shifted to Karachi. Here he started to organise rural work in a Pashtun area. To his misfortune, the area was a People's Party constituency and Mr Bhutto wouldn't have anyone 'mess with it'. Akhtar Hameed Khan had to leave the project unfinished.

Just at that time the Michigan State University offered him a chair in sociology. It also honoured him with an honorary LL.D. But Khan Sahib stayed there only for three years and came back to Karachi.

This time he took up a project of an urban slum development which at first seemed a totally impossible task. But the Khan was not to be daunted. The Orangi Pilot Project not only became a reality, it was successful too. The World Bank selected it as one of two urban development projects worldwide, worthy of study and emulation.

Then the trouble began. Religious parties and personalities ganged up against him.

His liberal views on Islam bothered them. They could not believe their eyes when they saw women working side by side with men in Orangi; they could not also believe their ears when they heard loudspeakers there urged women to practise family planning to improve their own, their families' and their country's wellbeing and prosperity.

A case was filed against him on the basis of an interview which he allegedly gave to an Indian newspaper and published in Takbir, a pro-Jamaat-e-Islami paper. Several 'ulema' issued 'fatwa' against him, pronouncing him a 'kafir' and 'wajib-ul qatl'. Thousands of posters appeared in the city calling for his death. The Jamaat chief persuaded Gen. Zia-ul Haq to proceed against Akhtar Hameed Khan. The evidence was too flimsy and weak. Even the police station refused to register the case. But eventually it got filed.

Later the influential complainants managed to get the case transferred to Multan where they thought they could manipulate the authorities. After much trouble, Akhtar Hameed Khan's lawyers managed to get the case transferred to Sahiwal. The court

also ordered the offending posters to be removed from the city walls.

He was charged under Sec 245 of the Penal Code, for allegedly defiling Prophet Mohammed's (SM) name. The section, a legacy from the British period's Indian Penal Code, had been amended during Zia-ul Haq's dictatorship as a sequel to Mr Bhutto's government declaring the Ahmadis as non-Muslims. The charge carries death sentence commutable to life imprisonment.

A second case of blasphemy was filed against Akhtar Hameed Khan in Karachi — this time for allegedly defiling the name of Hazrat Ali (RA) in a poem which he had written for children. The poem, published in 1982, tells the story of a poor man who raised a lion and was eventually killed by it. "Only the sickest of minds would read in it a reference to Hazrat Ali", comments Dawn's columnist. "At best it could be seen as a parable on Bhutto and Zia-ul Haq."

Thus the veteran, selfless and dedicated social worker is being haunted for the last four years by death threats, imprisonment and legal proceedings.

The Dawn columnist, Eghal Ahmed, sees this as "a parable of Pakistan: of i) the extremes of greatness and malice which dwell among us; ii) the distortion which law has undergone in the name of Islam; iii) the extent to which sectarian vigilantes have penetrated the government; and iv) the utter vulnerability of our state apparatus to evil."

Naturally, the latest incident has been universally condemned by the newspapers and human rights activists in the country. The Frontier Post has demanded that the authorities explain under whose orders and on what grounds the octogenarian social worker was detained and harassed, especially when they must have known that he had only recently suffered two massive heart attacks. It has also called upon the Prime Minister to pay personal attention to the matter because his government had recently taken umbrage to a poem for publishing which it had filed a seditious case against the News of Islamabad.

POLLS AND PERSPECTIVES-II

Economic Issues UK and USA Face Now

by MTHaq

THE world as a whole has been in deep trouble because of the long economic recession and political instability. Some countries of Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union are under very unstable conditions politically, socially, economically and militarily. A part of Yugoslavia (Bosnia) is being destroyed on ethnic and religious considerations without quick and effective action by the Western powers which are using the United Nations as an instrument for their action.

The poor countries of the world particularly are becoming poorer. The developed countries and the world institutions like the World Bank and the IMF have aimed directly or indirectly, at imposing the absolute freedom of private enterprise and market-oriented economies on some of these countries including some developing and least developed countries. Financial and technical assistance has tended to be made dependent on privatization, for example, while the real causes of business or economic failures and low growth rates in these countries yet remained to be adequately diagnosed and publicized.

I wish to comment on the principle of the freedom of private enterprise. Let the individuals have as much freedom as possible in the areas where free enterprise works. There are clearly the areas and occasions where state intervention in market-oriented economies is both desirable and necessary. The accepted position is that the whole economic framework of a country — capitalist or socialist — must be a mix of free enterprise and public enterprise in the interest of the society as a whole. The public enterprises which are needed in the interest of the society could be as efficient as free enterprises. The whole question then turns on the efficiency of organization and management both under

capitalism and socialism.

Moreover, to what extent are there full freedom and competition among the big industrial enterprises in these countries namely, UK and USA? The major big industries in these countries are highly cartelized and there is the practice or mechanism of market-sharing and price fixation among the big enterprises. In UK, for example, this system widely prevails in the building materials and other major industries some of which were privatized. They exercise monopoly powers and make profits by exploiting the public. During my recent stay in England I observed that some organizations like electricity, gas, telecommunication etc made huge profits and the salaries of the Chief Executives were enormously increased in some cases, whereas retrenchment of low paid workers in some of these industries continued on a considerable scale. The salaries of the top business executives have been increased enormously during the on-going serious economic recession which led to the dismissal of employees who had to fall back upon rather inadequate social benefits in the UK compared with those in most other European Community countries. Similar events have taken place in the USA where President George Bush has announced or proposed some cuts in the salaries of the top Government officials including his own salary, to reduce public expenditure. The question is why this kind of anti-social and pro-vested interest policies had so long been followed in the first place, in the context of the recent United States economic and financial position and during a recession which has been severe and long.

To conclude, private enterprise and initiative are both desirable and necessary and must not be stifled in any way to take a country's economy ahead. But this philosophy

does not rule out active state or government intervention particularly in strategic economic and social matters. The Government should also play, through an appropriate machinery, a general supervisory role over the whole economy in the public interest. In UK the National Economic Development Committee was surprisingly abolished after the election whereas this body should have been made more effective. These conditions are quite consistent with the operation of market-oriented economies and will ensure the promotion of the public interests.

Even Adam Smith, the author of The Wealth of Nations (1776) and the father of modern economics and a great exponent of the laissez-faire philosophy, did not rule out state intervention in certain essential areas like trade and defence. Speaking particularly of trade and business, Adam Smith remarked that when a number of businessmen or traders met together even informally, their conversations invariably ended in a sort of conspiracy against the public. Was it not a sufficient warning that public interests needed to be watched and supervised by an honest and efficient government? Alfred Marshall so eloquently referred to trade morality in his second most important book, Industry and Trade. The task is, however, formidably difficult. The USA tried to do it rather halfheartedly and unsuccessfully since 1890 when the Sherman Anti-trust Act was passed. It was only after the termination of the Second World War that the British Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Act was passed. I am not very sure if this Act still exists and plays any part now to protect the public interests, although privatization has, in all probability, strengthened the monopolistic and unfair practices in

trade and industry in Great Britain. Instead of state monopolies, they are now private monopolies which could be more harmful to the public interests.

At the end it will be most appropriate to refer to the words of wisdom uttered by the World Bank President Mr Lewis Preston at the last World Bank-IMF joint meeting held in Washington DC. He rightly said that after World War I (1914-18), governments turned inwards and made no systematic efforts to help rebuild, the defeated nations. The result was the 1929 Great Depression and the Second World War followed. But after the Second World War, "nations pursued growth-oriented domestic policies, pursued cooperative external policies and helped rebuild increasing needs". Further, Mr Preston warned against the dangers of countries becoming more protectionist. He emphasized that "in addition, the Bretton Woods institutions were" established to help promote growth and develop-

ment. I may add that another related institution, the WTO, remained to be formed mainly because of Lord Keynes's untimely death. However, "Two generations of social and economic advance resulted".

In the context of the present economic, political, social and military situations (I should probably say turmoil) emerging from the Cold War which Mr Preston called the "Third Global War," his remarks were that "this is a critical moment in history. The spirit of Bretton Woods must prevail". I am inclined to say that these words are sufficient indications for a return to the Keynesian Economics with most of its national and international implications. The framework of Keynesian policy gave Western capitalism a fresh lease of life and rescued it once from an utter collapse. The leaders with vision and imagination in countries under socialism can draw enough lessons for reform from their great teachers, namely, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao whose teachings and influence will no doubt stand the test of time. Moreover, a lot of experiences

in the working of both systems are there. I believe that both systems — Capitalism and Socialism — can borrow and learn a lot from each other to mutual gains. The acceptance of this attitude with a liberal mind will indeed open up a most fruitful field for modern economic and social research and may lead someday to the creation of what has been called "the Parliament of man and the Federation of the World" in a real sense and the Poet will no longer have to say "Have I not reason to lament what man has made of man?" It is my carefully considered opinion that there have been only two real breakthroughs in economic and social analysis — the first one by Karl Marx with the publication of his Das Kapital (1848) and the second one by Lord Keynes who published "The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money" (1936). Other writings on Capitalism and Socialism so far are mostly in the nature of further developments and quantifications of these two systems.

Concluded.

OPINION

Dr Kamal Hossain and Awami League

Md Atiqul Karim

Dr Kamal Hossain, a veteran politician and ex-president member of the Awami League is back home after a long tour abroad. The political circle concedes his presence in the country as 'most crucial and challenging' for the Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, especially in the aftermath of his not being elected to the party presidency.

Meanwhile, some stalwarts of the Awami League have met Dr. Kamal Hossain sounding a note of dissent to the 'policy formulation' by Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, perhaps to the annoyance of her 'loyalists'.

The arrival of Dr. Hossain has evoked mixed reaction from the Awami League activists at home and abroad. Some hold the view that his exclusion has indirectly hastened the possibility of an imminent split within the Awami League. It is more evident as some topnotchers of the party are learnt to have been exerting tremendous pressure on Dr. Hossain to get out of Awami League and form an independent political party under his leadership.

Incidentally, he happens to be the convener of Democratic Forum — a non-political organisation formed recently to help flourish stable democracy in the country. With a view to bringing about significant changes in the political sce-

nario of the country, it is further learnt that the said leaders have assured their fullest cooperation to Dr. Hossain if he agreed in principle to convert the Democratic Forum into a full-fledged political party.

Since parleys are still going on privately, none of the leaders including Dr. Kamal himself, is willing to divulge the outcome of discourse at this stage. A source, however, close to him has hinted, on condition of anonymity, that he (Dr. Hossain) is deeply contemplating to transform the Democratic Forum into a political party weighing very carefully the pros and cons of it. He may make a press statement in this regard, the source informed.

It is no denying that Dr. Kamal Hossain won't be able to ward off the trouble he is facing from his own party Awami League so easily. Being deprived of the grace of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, he seems to be a little bit upset to project publicly his future course of action. Moreover, the newly elected General Secretary of the Awami League has blasted him for making derogatory statement to the press soon after arrival which, according to him, has shattered the image of Awami League to a great extent. It is equally true that Dr. Kamal Hossain is yet to wriggle out of the allegation that he

had not done anything for Awami League for the last one and a half years.

The statement made by the General Secretary of the Awami League concerning Dr. Kamal has stirred the conscience of the democracy-loving people. Since Dr. Hossain himself speaks for democracy inside Awami League, it is unworthy of hearing that he didn't advocate for democracy at the time of getting nomination as a Presidential candidate in 1981. Rather, he had opted for a compromise formula to choose a candidate. The nation will immensely be benefited if Dr. Hossain makes a public statement through media in this regard.

The serious allegation made against Dr. Kamal Hossain is his inability to allot enough time for the sake of party politics which he can't refute either, because of the fact that public is more or less aware of it. Since he is a professional of international repute, it is natural to think that he may not always be available to serve his party's interest which can better be termed as 'unintentional'. His sojourn in connection with personal business abroad may be a set back for the party he belongs to — his critics opine.

Dr. Hossain will therefore, be required to curtail some of his foreign tours and allot more time for the sake of native politics.

To the Editor...

Forecast on Bush

Sir, Of late let this be known that, Mr. George Bush will be elected as president of America for second term through the General Election to be held on 3rd November.

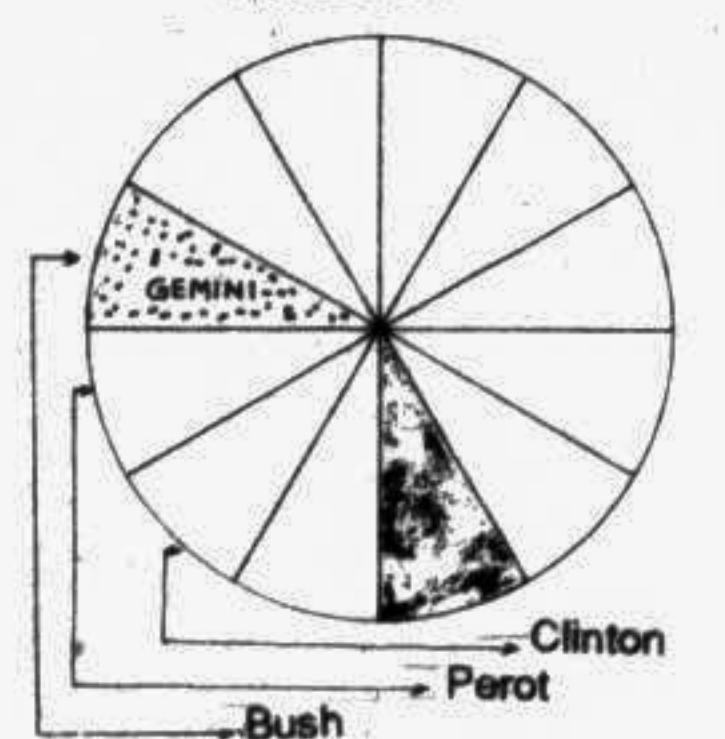
Mr Bush will occupy the reign in triumph for increasing the prestige of American families. The opponents of Mr Bush may be seen as the self-constituted leaders.

Very positively be declared in mixed horograph that Mr Bush will become victory by getting 52% of votes cast.

Mr Bush as a competent leader, in the zodiac of a twin group, will be fittest to end the

world as well as his domestic crises in a nice manner.

HOROGRAPH



Ali Hossain North Masdair, Narayanagarj

Bush a bushman?

Sir, During his election campaign President George Bush compared the capabilities of Clinton and Gore in Foreign Affairs as below that of his pet dog!

This is indeed below the norms of dignity and decorum. It tarnishes the image of the leader of the world's largest democracy and the leader of world's only superpower.

How could he stoop so low? We wonder, is this the right man with the right mentality to lead the promising New World Order?

S A Mansoor Gulshan, Dhaka