

With Understanding and Firmness

It is a frightening piece of statistics — one crore drug addicts in the seven SAARC countries. The UNB report covering the SAARC symposium in Dhaka on the subject also cited the presence of two lakh drug addicts in Bangladesh. How should we react to this? But before making sure of our feelings let us notice that in another part of the same report it says, quoting a home journal on the subject, that there are 15 lakh ganja addicts in this country and another 10 lakh take tranquilisers regularly.

The latter big figures should include those afflicted persons carrying on the very old subcontinental tradition of using controlled doses of narcotics for living with their painful diseases such as terminal cases of cancer. And then again certain religious sects, specially the fringe ones making music and mysticism their mainstay of devotion, use narcotics religiously and attract many a false neophytes by this practice. In certain great religious festivals such as the Durga Puja, there is a universal consumption of bhang, siddhi, charas etc. by certain communities. As for tranquilisers, modern-day tension and man's increasing search for an easy way out of even the slightest pain, make up for the growing use of the — harmful, not doubt, but never alarming, helping of sedatives.

Even after allowing for the above, the drug situation in Bangladesh should give anyone who cares a regular scare. And we know, like the government, people who matter do not care. It is said with force and conviction in all of Bangladesh the small pharmacist's shop, there should be thousands of them, thrive on selling narcotics — obliterating the semantic difference between drug in the pejorative harmful sense and the other one which has been a healing friend of humanity from long before the time of the legendary imhotep. Main street Dhaka and other principal thoroughfares and arcades in the other cities excepted, there is no reason why the alarming news shouldn't be true. Whom do the purveyors of the dreamy death find their clientele among? The new generation of our youth, to be sure. That the whole of this generation isn't perpetually on the high, is largely the work of social and religious values and action in the matter by organised bodies, eminently the government, has been very conspicuously absent. Two lakh addicts or ten, compared to a population of eleven crore-plus, is not worrisome. But once you come to think that it can as well be fifty lakh among a population of five crore in the age band of 15 to 35 — that is ten per cent of our youth are addicted — the neglect shown to the situation becomes criminal. On the government side there is news of big crore-Taka hauls of narcotics every now and then — and never of the arrest and punishment of the small vendors and the consumers. In Malaysia whoever is found to be in possession of any part of a gram of drug is tried and put to death. Some foreign citizens were among those hanged for the crime in spite of frantic mercy appeals by their home governments. Why cannot Bangladesh government follow Malaysia in this? If anything, they look the other way when transactions take place or the dens are dense with clouds of narcotics enough to hypnotise a block.

We need to be very understanding of the youth's slide into addiction — poverty and unemployment and the vanishing value system all pushing them into a life of despair. At the same time we must be firm in dealing with the practice. After all we haven't earned this place with blood and tear only to leave it to millions of addicts or somnambulists.

Bright Future for Solar Energy

The looming threat of an environmental catastrophe of unprecedented order has forced people the world over to be cautious in their use of natural resources. It is not only because the reserves of those resources are limited, but also because the modes of their use are anti-environmental. Coal and oil, the two chief and until-now cheap automobile and industrial fuels, have come under attack — and not for nothing — from environmentalists. The two types of fuel have helped human civilisation to progress in leaps and bounds, but certainly at a great cost. Today's concern is how to obviate the cumulative effects of the whole range of environmental degradation to which industrial and automobile effluents and emissions have greatly contributed.

It is exactly at this point that the search for alternative energy sources has begun. Quite obviously, the main focus is now riveted upon the solar energy. Technology developed so far has already been able to make good use of solar power, but admittedly this is not yet enough for large-scale commercial consumption. The tumbling block is surely going to be the high production cost. The systems now in application for power generation from the sun, according to experts participating in a seminar on "The Prospects of Solar Energy in Tropical Countries" held recently at the Goethe Institute in the city, are highly useful. The optimism expressed by the scientists about the future of solar energy in the country should be well received. It is really good to know that the photo voltaic (PV) system "is simple, dependable and can be used on any scale."

In a country of abundant sunlight, it is very tempting to share the optimism of the experts at the seminar. But the missing point there was the all-important question of economic viability. Sure enough, for some localised purposes the system can be effective. However, the costs for large-scale production of power are bound to prove forbidding. What is the way out then? No ready answer as yet from the world scientist community. But continuous research, we believe, will provide the right answer to make such power generation economical. By the way, our own record in the area is very dismal. Given the natural supply of the energy in abundance, attempts should be made to harness it with the minimum investment. But this is going to be a most daunting task. Collaboration with scientists in other countries advanced in the technology will help avoid the unnecessary costs on experiments already done. The natural edge they enjoy in terms of finance and research base cannot be ignored. Against such a backdrop, it is desirable that private companies and entrepreneurs join in the task of such research ventures. They can take advantage of the systems already in vogue to lessen the pressure on the conventional energy sources.

How Clinton Won the White House: an Analysis

THE American election held on November 3 was undoubtedly an event of great national and international significance. Nationally it marked the end of the conservative era initiated by President Reagan, a period in American politics which was noted for the massive build-up of its military strength and increase in social and racial tension. Internationally the end of the Bush presidency coincided with the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the retreat of Marxism from the European scene. Thus we are in the threshold of big changes in international relations.

The election was fought with vigour and passion. Neither side hesitated in making personal attacks. Yet the democratic tradition in that country is so strong that the process of healing the scars caused by the campaign started immediately. The gracious statement by Bush conceding victory to Clinton truly reflected the essence of democracy. The equally gracious and generous statement made by Clinton removed, in one stroke, the bitterness generated by the campaign and created the goodwill necessary for a smooth transition process. It also reassured the American people that their leaders were indeed playing the game according to the rules. I cannot resist the temptation to quote some of the remarks made by Clinton while paying tribute to Bush. He said, inter alia, "I want all of you to join with me tonight in expressing our gratitude to President Bush for his lifetime of public service, for the effort he made from the time he was a young soldier in World War II, to helping to bring about an end to the Cold War, to our victory in the Gulf War, to the grace with which he conceded the results of this election tonight in the finest American tradition." These are words which would gladden the hearts of all Americans irrespective of party affiliation. Their leaders are clearly able to put the country ahead of their narrow party interests. I can hardly

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over-emphasize this point because we do not seem to have such graciousness in our character. Not magnanimity but arrogance in victory seems to be the common experience in Bangladesh.

In terms of electoral votes Clinton achieved a landslide victory. However, his 370 votes against 168 secured by Bush gives an exaggerated impression about the nature of his victory. In fact, Clinton got 43% and Bush got 38% of the popular votes. Surprisingly, Ross Perot got as much as 18% of the popular votes though he failed to get any electoral votes because he did not get the majority votes in any state. To clarify the American presidential election system I may explain that the winner of a state's popular vote is awarded all the electoral votes from that state. To win the Presidency, 270 electoral votes are needed. An analysis of the election results clearly shows that Bush was rejected by all the New England states including New York with its 33 electoral votes. The west coast states also turned against him. California alone with its 54 votes can tilt the balance. The mid-western industrial states such as Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan went solidly for Clinton. Bush did win the big and populous state of Texas with 32 votes but the rest of the states won by him were sparsely populated with few electoral votes.

The usual explanation for the debacle suffered by Bush is that he was a victim of the recession. The high rate of unemployment as well as the generally lacklustre performance of the economy was responsible for his defeat. His brilliant victory (at least from the American point of view) over Iraq, skilful handling of the events surrounding the collapse of the former Soviet Union as well as his natural advantage as the incumbent president failed to rescue him from defeat. What went wrong? Was the economic issue the only

reason? After analyzing the voting pattern I feel that there are other and equally important contributing factors which led to the swing in favour of the Democratic nominee.

Clinton's victory was based in part, on a strong vote from women. On the basis of the exit poll it has been estimated that while 47 per cent of the women voted for Clinton, only 36 per cent voted for Bush. The abortion issue seems to have exercised a decisive influence in determining women's attitude. Bush is opposed to abortion under all circumstances while Clinton supports the right of the women to take the final decision in the matter. Women are themselves divided on the issue but it seems that the majority are not with Bush on this

termining the voting pattern. In the age group of 18 to 29 years, 44 per cent voted for Clinton but only 33 per cent of the middle-aged people the difference was less. In the 45-59 age group Clinton got 43% and Bush got 38%. However, the difference became very sharp in the '60 and older' group. 50 per cent of these elderly people voted for Clinton but only 37 per cent went in favour of Bush. Quite clearly the younger generation want change which Bush had failed to give them in his first term. Clinton's health care programme must have been a most important consideration for swinging the elderly in his favour.

Fourthly, Clinton did very well among the middle class

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

question. In terms of voting this must have been a significant factor in favour of Clinton.

Secondly, black voters gave solid support to Clinton. According to exit polls published by the Washington Post 83 per cent of the black voters voted for Clinton but only 11 per cent voted for Bush. Hispanics and other minorities also favoured the Democratic ticket. As many as 62 per cent of them voted for Clinton but only 24 per cent voted for Bush. The white voters, however, were almost equally divided — 40% voted for Clinton and 39% for Bush. Thus the Democratic challenger was seen by the minorities as their champion. The black voters, together with the Hispanics (Spanish-speaking people, mainly of Mexican origin), Vietnamese, Chinese and other Asian immigrants have become an important factor in American politics.

Thirdly, age and income played a major influence in de-

and poorer sections of the society though the affluent voters went solidly for Bush. 59 per cent of the voters with less than \$15,000 annual income voted for Clinton but only 22 per cent of them voted for Bush. 46% of the voters with income in the \$15,000 to \$29,999 range voted for Clinton but only 34% voted for Bush. In the \$30,000 to \$49,999 range 42% voted for Clinton and 37% went for Bush. In the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range the votes were equally divided by the two candidates. However among people with income in the '\$75,000 and over' range, Bush got 46% of the votes against 38% for Clinton. The rich were for the Republican ticket but unfortunately for Bush their number is small. Clinton went for the middle class voters and promised them that he would finance his health care and other employment-generating programmes to revive the econ-

omy by taxing only the rich and foreign companies. He would also make deep cuts in the defence budget by withdrawing a larger number of troops from Europe. This strategy seems to have worked. Traditionally supporters of the Democratic party, these middle class voters were won over by Reagan by promises that there would be no tax increase during his term. Bush also made a similar pledge in 1988 though he failed to keep it. Clinton used this same pledge very skillfully on a selective basis and won them back.

The Ross Perot candidacy does not seem to have affected the outcome in any significant manner though he certainly had a big impact on the issues. For example, he successfully alerted the American people about the dangerous situation created by the four trillion dollar national debt and continuing Federal deficits. Whatever his quirks, Perot gave voice to an anger and frustration that the country's political parties had not fully understood. He brought excitement and uncertainty in the campaign but in the end the voters went for the candidates nominated by the two traditional political parties. According to exit polls, 37% of the Perot supporters would have voted for Clinton if Perot was not a candidate and 38% would have voted for Bush. Thus in terms of impact on the results the Perot candidacy was not of much significance.

The choice of senator Al Gore as his running mate was plus point for Clinton. Handsome and articulate with a solid reputation as an intellectual, he strengthened Clinton's hands. The image of two young, vigorous and dynamic men inspired confidence in the team. In sharp contrast, Vice-President Quayle was a mill-stone around the neck of Bush. For four years Quayle has been the butt of jokes in the country as man of limited intelligence who gained prominence in public life entirely due to the influence of a wealthy family. His performance in the debate with Senator Gore was better than expected but even then it is doubtful if he brought any votes to Republican side.

One final comment before I conclude this analysis. The call for change which was Clinton's campaign theme seemed to have received a positive response from the people. Twelve years of Republican rule had become somewhat stale and unexciting. Clinton may have reminded the American voters of another charismatic democratic president—John F. Kennedy—whose short but eventful term as President is still remembered by the people with fondness and pride. Clinton is young and at least in foreign affairs inexperienced. Yet he has successfully convinced the American people that the torch must pass on to the new generation which he represents. It will be fascinating to observe how this dynamic and skilful politician leads his great nation during the next four years.

Despite the interest in Bangladesh about American election, I should add that the American policy-makers are hardly aware of our existence. We do not figure in their calculations. Bangladesh has neither a big deposit of oil nor strategic importance. In the global geo-political power play we are not a player. However, it should be said in all fairness that the Democratic party and its stalwarts gave strong support to the cause of the people of Bangladesh during our Liberation War. Unlike Nixon and Kissinger and members of the Republican administration who openly supported the Pakistani military junta, Senators Edward Kennedy, Frank Church, Mondale and Congressman Gallagher and many others in the Democratic party raised their voice in our favour. I will not therefore be surprised if we are able to establish greater rapport and understanding with a Democratic administration.

ning water, no electricity and no toilet. The wooden roof that should have been replaced long ago leaks constantly in the cold, driving rain that lashes the hills 10 months out of a year.

In mid-August, workers in six estates in this district went on strike demanding the management repair their storm-damaged homes. The strike was called off after the new plantation managers assured the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the main plantation union, that they will improve housing.

According to CWC's vice president, S. Sathasivam, who says "housing is our main priority." The party has been unable to do anything for the workers because the majority of the Indian Tamils obtained Sri Lankan citizenship only last year.

"Around a million third and fourth generation Indian Tamils were stateless, and thus were deprived on any state benefit, education and health facilities," he told IPS.

Health services are almost non-existent in the plantations. Infant mortality is alarmingly high. Says R. Sevalingam, a labour leader in Pedro Estates: "My wife had eight children, but only two survived."

"Every week we have a meeting with the management," he added. "We demand better housing and sanitation, but the management is not helping us." — IPS

Sri Lanka

Tempest in the Tea Estates

Trouble is brewing among tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka, home of the famous Ceylon tea. Nadia Bilbassy reports from Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka.

The money has not trickled down to the 500,000 tea workers, most of them women, who are often their families' principal bread winners. A tea worker's daily pay is 60 rupees, less than US\$ 1.50, for plucking 18 kgs of leaves.

Sandampapu says if she wants to make a little more money she has to work at least 10 hours every day. For every extra kilogramme she plucks, she is paid three rupees. But in this patriarchal society, Sandampapu, like other women tea workers, have no control of their wages. Violence and sexual abuse are commonplace. And fights between husbands and wives are usual on pay day.

As part of the traditional employment arrangements, the workers live with their families in squalid 'lines' — rows of one-roomed homes — on the estates. The barrack-style quarters were built by the British early this century.

Sri Lanka's tea, coconut and rubber plantations had been under state control for two decades. This year, the estates were handed over to private managers, a move officials hope will revive the ailing industry.

But Colombo has paid little attention to the workers' longstanding demand to be settled outside the estates. The tea pickers believe living away from the estates is crucial in improving their lot economically and socially.

Surveys have shown the majority of plantation women are malnourished and anaemic. Respiratory diseases and stomach ailments are common, the result of damp lying quarters and unsafe drinking water.

On the Pedro Estate in Nuwara Eliya, Sandampapu shares one room with her husband, daughter and son who is married and has a three-month-old baby.

The room has no window. It is dark and damp with no run-



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.

Dhaka Day by Day

Sir, I am a regular reader of your esteemed daily. The column "Dhaka Day by Day" is my most favourite. All the writers writing for that column are good. But the writings of Ms Parveen Anam are uncommon. I enjoy her pieces very much. Please convey my regards to Ms Parveen Anam. It is my request to you to print at least two of her pieces in a week, if possible. I am sure that would be appreciated by other readers too.

Imran Ahmed
Deobhog, Narayanganj

Words and deeds

Sir, With reference to your second editorial "Two Cheers for Mr Khan" dated 25.10.92... 'Mr Khan has said things that are universally known. Still he cheer him very genuinely for no sitting Minister has so far dared to call the spade a spade in such a manner', — and thus

he gets a cheer. But a few of us who have been in this world for a long time and have seen many Governments go by would tend to take the remarks of Mr Zahiruddin Khan, Planning Minister as words full of "sound and fury" achieving little. So, we wait and see how he plans our future at least for the next five years.

Words may be inspiring but it is the follow-up action which will lend credibility to him. The important thing for him is to go ahead bravely in what he believes to be right for the country. The sickness is well known, and what is needed is somebody to inject the proper medicine.

M H Shaikh
Mirpur, Dhaka

Banning of books

Sir, I was sufficiently alarmed by the implications of your report "Seen from the Gallery" to respond to the encounter in parliament on 26

October, between a member of parliament and the Home Minister.

A Jatiya Party member of parliament was reported to have taken offence at Taslima Nasrin and demanded a ban on her book "Nirbachita Column" repeating conventional accusations of its "aspersion to our independence and sovereignty, a threat to our religious harmony, and insulting to the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition." The Home Minister, with even less parliamentary decorum, volunteered to ban the book immediately. But for the intervention of the Speaker Mr Razaque Ali, it would have been difficult to differentiate the voices of democratically elected people's representatives from the injunctions by two military rulers Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan who had tried to prevent people learning about the writings of Rabin-dranath Tagore and Badruddin Umar.

This exchange is worrying on two counts: first, it indicates a total incapacity to recognise facts, and second, it indicates the alacrity with which democratic forms are likely to be subverted.

The charge of aspersion to our independence and sovereignty has not been substantiated, at least in your pages. On the second charge,

can the JP MP deny the factual evidence of the occasional oppression on the minority community and the more recent widespread attack on their temples during his party's government in October 1990? It is surprising that he does not see a threat to religious harmony in the act of destruction but in the description of the act.

The third accusation regarding the reference to both the leaders of the House and the Opposition is even more surprising. Surely this is not the first time when the factual events leading to their rise to power have been mentioned in public. Most recently at a seminar organised by Women for Women, their emergence in politics and their disengagement from the women's constituency was presented before the Deputy Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition and women parliamentarians. In fact both of them have said in public that they represent the whole country and therefore cannot directly share the concerns of women.

On the second count, the Home Minister's reflex to ban the book raises apprehensions of a return to a medieval "inquisition of the mind", obstructing an individual's right to free speech, the need for an open society and for a respon-

sible exchange of ideas. If what has been said is untrue and without any basis, why cannot they enter into the debate and answer with seasoned arguments? Does the MP suggest that elected representatives are above debate and criticism? Is the "return to democracy", acclaimed by the political parties merely an excuse for frivolous mudslinging in parliament, or do we really understand it as a system which provides space for free expression at different levels of society?

Hasna Hussain
Shantinagar, Dhaka

Malaysia

Sir, I have gone through the interview published in your daily captioned "The UN Security Council should be Expanded" dated 11-11-92. The interviewer Mahfuz Anam, Executive Editor of The Daily Star has been very sincere in his efforts to project the views of Malaysian government in promoting economic cooperation among the ASEAN countries.

The Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi has made it explicitly clear that the very purpose of G-15 (group of 15 countries from Asia Pacific,

Latin America and Africa) is not only to evolve a practical mechanism for cooperation within a particular region, but also to expand the idea far and near.

It is pertinent to mention that although the SAARC members are committed to peaceful cohesion and better understanding, there are provocative issues to mar the existing ties of amity among them. In this context, the role of Malaysia, a very powerful NAM member is of utmost significance. We are glad to know that Malaysia is striving to persuade the ASEAN countries to assist Bangladesh at this crucial stage of facing the Rohingya situation, which is undoubtedly an international humanitarian problem.

Despite the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-religious state, it has been successful to set up an instance of stable democracy through 'good governance'. The readers are happy to know that it was possible only for formation of an effective coalition before election in that country. Can't it be followed by the leaders of other Third World countries, including Bangladesh?

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