

Chandrika Does it Again

It has been a double triumph for Chandrika Kumaratunga. Earlier she had been elected the Sri Lankan Prime Minister after her party, the People's Alliance, emerged victorious at the parliamentary polls ending a 17-year rule by the United National Party. With a marked consistency, the voters now choose her as the country's President.

Kumaratunga's agenda and the way she went about addressing them on becoming the prime minister, struck a responsive chord in the electorate. Significantly, she has curried favour with a large segment of the Sinhalese vote bank, the biggest majority factor in Sri Lankan politics, despite her actively negotiating with the Tamil Tigers. Chandrika duly picked up the minority votes of the Tamils and the Muslims.

So, it has been a vote for national reconciliation, peace and re-construction in Sri Lanka. The re-endorsement of Kumaratunga's agenda comes on two levels. The majority have made it abundantly clear that they prefer a peace offensive against the LTTE to a military confrontation with them. Secondly, by electing Chandrika as the president, the voters have paved the way for transfer of power to the parliament from an all-powerful presidency. If the president and the prime minister were different persons, Kumaratunga's plan to clip the presidential authority would have met with opposition.

There is talk of naming Mrs Bandaranaike as the prime minister. And, after the constitutional changes have been brought about, reverting the polity to a parliamentary system, Srimavo could be made the ceremonial head of state while Kumaratunga became the prime minister. This would be keeping two of the highest positions of the country within the same family. With full deference to her revered personage, one may still hold that it will be somewhat typical of the South Asian political heritage.

Stop this Child-bashing

The police on Thursday demonstrated that given the chance they can put on an ideal performance of amused aloofness. They were a picture of tolerance. But where should the credit go for this? It is very easy to see that police act only as a limb of the government.

It is widely accepted that it should be so. But the issue becomes difficult when police act quite unlawfully and against the basic rights of the people whether or not at the instruction of their superiors.

Any police excess is an excess if perpetrated out of law and the norms of decency and social propriety. No policeman, including top brass, has ever been heard to decline an instruction to commit excess. Police thus bind themselves unnecessarily to atrocity. On the other hand it can also be that the individual cases of excesses are impromptu improvisations by the policemen themselves.

The government thought the LDF hartal to be inconsequential and let it pass benignly. They could try this on consequential ones also and allow people first to defy and then to denounce hartals as a political weapon. Why can't they do it? This question must go unanswered for some time yet — things are so much knotty. But government owes an answer on the question of child bashing by its police which it can ignore at a substantial loss to national image.

Isn't Bangladesh a signatory to the UN Declaration of Children's Rights? How can its police, brutally assault children on even a tension-free day like Thursday? The *tokai* is a constant pain in the neck of the government, in fact all successive governments. The *tokai* is a living condemnation of the ways of our governments, past and present. The present government, rather than facing the challenge of this floating new generation, is compounding it by going on record as child-bashers of a very cruel kind. The government must find other lawful and humane ways to win the *tokai* away from what he has been for years — the backbone of all agitational programmes.

Criminally Bent

A group of teen-aged girls in New South Wales, Australia, enticed a 55-year-old man into a park where he was beaten to death by their boyfriends. The motive of this bizarre and gruesome murder was to loot money and all the valuables the man possessed and then hold a drinking party. Aged between 11 and 15 years, the teenagers carried out their murder plan with utmost precision. Here is a story that is simply mind-boggling. It matters little whether the incident has taken place in that continent of a country. With each such incident the entire human race is belittled.

Teen-agers of that group are least expected to be criminals. This is the formative stage of human mind and no society is foolish enough to bring up young ones as monsters. William Golding in his inimitable style first pointed to the criminal in the age of innocence. Even the setting of his Nobel Prize-winning novel, "Lord of the Flies" was an island jungle not easily negotiable. But today society itself is turning into a huge jungle where teen-agers kill a middle-aged man just for fun or a group of young boys brutally kill another boy, Isha, who could soon be a close friend of them, for loot.

Such crimes do not take place every often but there is little doubt that their number is growing fast. The impressionable mind is getting diabolical too. A sort of perversion is taking hold of the psyche that was once thought to be most sensitive and therefore incapable of committing crimes. No more incorruptible, these young generation gives the hint of further degeneration and dehumanization. But they are not solely to blame. The fact that society today fails to uphold values and set any lofty ideals before them is mostly at the root of this problem. As society grows more demanding, individuals are swept away by a growing acquisitive instinct. They have no time to pause and look inward. The young ones feel neglected and soon get acquainted with cheap entertainment and thrills. We must review our life-style to stem the rot.

AMERICAN presidential election is a truly global event. Like the Olympics virtually the whole world joins the American people in viewing the drama that unfolds over several months every fourth year. The leaks and counter-leaks and disclosures about the personal lives of the candidates, the TV debates and the gradual building up of the campaign fever towards a climax creates tremendous interest in the whole election process. Thanks to the satellite television, people all over the world can watch the race from the Primary to the Election day. Compared to the colourful and exciting duel between the two finalists who emerge from a gruelling fight for party nomination, the mid-term elections are a much less exciting affair. Essentially a national political event, international interest in the mid-term election is very limited. The number of seats won or lost in the Congress is, of course, significant even for the international community but the common people around the globe do not consider it very interesting or exciting.

This year's mid-term election, I should hasten to add, is an exception. To the American people and all those around the world who closely follow US politics, the 1994 mid-term elections look more like a political earthquake. Known landscapes seem to have disappeared. The Democratic Party has suffered disastrous losses all around the country. According to latest information, for the first time in 40 years the Republican Party has gained a majority in both Houses of the Congress. From 44 seats in the Senate the Republicans have increased their number to 53 seats. From 56 seats out of the 100 seats of the Senate the Democrats have been reduced to only 47. The results for the House of Representatives are equally breath-taking. From a total of 178 in the last House the Republicans have increased their number to 229, an increase of 51 members. From a commanding majority of 256 the Democrats have been reduced to 204 seats. In a House of 435 members, the number needed for an absolute majority is 218 which the Republicans have got securely in their control. The race for the governorship has also been equally shattering for the Democratic Party. Of the 50 states where elections for the State Houses were held, the Republicans have increased their number by 10 to a total of 29. A most durable politician like Governor Cuomo of New York has lost to the challenger Republican candidate.

US Mid-term Elections: What is Behind the Democratic Debacle?

President Clinton's legislative agenda was encountering strong opposition even with a Congress controlled by the Democratic Party; now with the Republicans in charge, the prospects look very bleak indeed.

The immediate significance of the Democratic debacle is their loss of the leadership of the Senate and House Committees. These committees, unlike the ineffectual committees in the Bangladesh Parliament, are the centres of Congressional politics. Congressional power is exercised through the chairmanship of

Political analysts and experts are already busy diagnosing the reason for this devastating trouncing of the Democratic Party. Some of them are already talking about the 'Hillary and Bill Effect'. In fact, this seems to be the favourite and perhaps the most obvious explanation. The popularity rating of President Bill

Clinton had plunged so low that some of the Democratic candidates were afraid to have him around. The result also defied another conventional wisdom. It is generally believed that an economic upturn benefits the incumbents but it did not happen this time. The negative factors must have been powerful enough to nullify the natural advantage that an incumbent president enjoys when the economy is growing and employment level is rising. In the field of foreign affairs President Clinton started off

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

these committees. Past Republican presidents had to reckon with the highly influential chairmen of these committees. Indeed the cooperation of these powerful men was an essential pre-requisite for these success of their legislative programmes. President Clinton's legislative agenda was encountering strong opposition even with a Congress controlled by the Democratic Party; now with the Republicans in charge, the prospects look very bleak indeed.

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The Dialogue and How to End it

by Abu Abdullah

THE so-called "dialogue" — parallel monologues — would be a more apt designation — still drags on. Indications are that it will not lead anywhere, since the Opposition seems determined that nothing short of their complete package is acceptable. We shall then enter a phase of "agitation" — strikes, rallies, demonstrations, burning of vehicles, and so on. Any chances we had of following in the steps of the "tigers" will go up in smoke, as other nations with more disciplined politics proceed to occupy the available market niches. The people of Bangladesh will pay the price in poverty perpetuated.

The demand for a "neutral caretaker government", whatever its precise constitution, does have some intrinsic merit. In a country where the bases of democracy are as fragile as they are in Bangladesh,

the fear of electoral manipulation by the ruling party is a legitimate one. Very likely if the BNP had been in the opposition, they would themselves have raised the same demand.

Why is the ruling party so adamantly opposed to the idea? That it is not provided for in the Constitution is neither here nor there. If the ruling party and the Opposition get together, the necessary amendment could be passed by an overwhelming majority. Perhaps it is the implied slur on their integrity that rankles. Or perhaps it is simply a question of "face" — the demand has to be opposed simply because the Opposition is making such a to-do about it, and accepting it would look like a sign of weakness, even a defeat. Or, more ominously,

the BNP may really feel that its chances of re-election would be significantly lower under a caretaker government.

If I may venture to offer some unsolicited advice, it may in fact be sound political strategy for the BNP to accept the Opposition demand. First of all, while some will no doubt interpret this as a sign of weakness, I think more people will see it as an action taken in the greater interest of the nation, to avoid civil unrest, insecurity, and perhaps worse, and thus help re-establish an atmosphere congenial to productive investment. Secondly, while the Opposition may rejoice in their "triumph", they will probably soon realise that in fact the wind has been neatly taken out of their sails, and they have again become an Opposition without a pro-

gramme. For that really is the problem, the Opposition, particularly the Awami League, have to live with. They have no viable alternative to offer to the people, certainly not in the sphere of economic policy, which is likely to be the decisive factor at this juncture. In fact it is my impression that the agitation for the caretaker government was initiated to a large extent because they could find nothing else to agitate about.

So my suggestion is: be bold, do the unexpected, accept the Opposition formula (perhaps even the Huda formula). You will win more friends than you lose, while the opposite will be true for the Opposition.

The writer is a well known economist, and occasionally contributes to this paper.

WITH Semra Ozal, wife of late President Turgut Ozal testifying at the prosecutor's office of Sisli district of Istanbul, 'Civangate' (read Jivangate), the bribery scandal which broke on 20 September last, reached new heights. It is number one news in all Turkish dailies and one of the largest circulation daily Sabah devoted entire front page to this latest development. It quoted Semra Ozal as saying, "I swear on the head of my three children that I did not telephone (Mafia boss Dundar Kilic)." She was contradicting the statement of Ugur Cakici, daughter of Kilic, who had named Semra Ozal, who was stated to have made that now famous telephone call. Kilic had earlier confirmed that the telephone had come from a 'respectable person' and had named the widow of President Ozal.

Four bullets were fired on 20 September last at Engin Civan, former General Manager of the large state run Emlak-

'CIVANGATE'

The Bribery Scandal Stirs Turkey

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

bank (Property Bank). The shots fired at point blank range wounded Civan and his photo with an arm on the sling has become a very familiar one in all Turkish households. As the bribery scandal has unfolded it has transpired that a businessman refused to pay.

The shooting of Civan brought to the forefront famous Baba (Turkish for Mafia boss) Dundar Kilic, who stated that he had received telephone calls from 'a respectable person' to settle the differences between Civan and Edes. In their original statements both 'Baba' Kilic and daughter Ugur had said that the phone calls came from Semra Edes, wife of the businessman. Now both have stated that they had lied and the calls had come from Semra, the wife of late President Ozal.

In this daily growing cast of characters two important missing persons are Alaettin Cakici, married to Ugur, daughter of Cakici, and who is a well known figure of the underworld. He was reported to have escaped from Turkey in a speedboat following the shooting. He was at one stage reported to have been killed in a ferry crossing from Scotland to Belgium and his body thrown in the sea 'in a sack'. This report has since been denied. Cakici has a long history of criminal record and is known to have undergone 'surgery' in the past to totally change his face'. He is now reported to have divorced Ugur, who appeared smiling on TV while confirming this news. The second missing person is Ferizat Vuruskan, a

close associate of Civan and reportedly his mistress. She is reported to have disappeared with tapes, thus triggering a close parallel with Watergate.

The name of Ahmet Ozal, son of the late President, has become mixed up with this bribery scandal. He is the owner of a TV channel and various enterprises. He is reported to have large outstanding loans with banks including Emlakbank. His mother had earlier described the 'Civangate' scandal as 'a plot to smear the name of Turgut Ozal and keep Ahmet out of politics.' Ahmet Ozal has broadly hinted that he will be a candidate in the next partial Parliamentary elections on 4 December next. There is more than a broad hint in the Turkish media that behind Selim Edes, the

bankrupt businessman, who provoked the shooting of Civan, there is the hand of Ahmet Ozal. After the appearance of his mother before the prosecutor, it looks nearly certain that he will be called to testify.

'Civangate' is absorbing the Turkish media and public like no other single event. Recently, Semra Ozal was nearly crushed under the weight of TV cameramen, newsmen and photographers, although she came and went by the garage door and had a large number of body guards. Newspapers frontpaged photos of Semra, the radiant wife of the late President and a haggard woman battling against the press of photographers. So high is the curiosity in the Turkish public regarding this bribery scandal that a huge

'Evil Empire' was their government with its vast arsenal of the deadliest weapons. They instinctively rallied round these governments.

The stability of the ruling parties in all these Western countries and their grip on power was, at least to a significant extent, due to this common threat perception among the common people. The disappearance of the common threat has removed the ideological smoke screen from people's eyes. They are no longer prepared to accept politicians at their face value. They have begun to question their conduct, their performance and above all, their ethical standard. They are no longer prepared to condone corruption in high places. Of course, such a theory tends to suffer from over-simplification. Actually the situation in each country is not only different but highly complex.

What we have witnessed in the United States must be the culmination of a process which was underway for several years but few people paid any attention to it. There may be other, more country-specific, reasons for the defeats suffered by the ruling parties. Time will perhaps give us a greater understanding of the underlying causes of such a massive debacle suffered by the Democratic Party. In fact, as a result of this year's election, politics in America, especially congressional politics, will not be the same again. Republican politicians will assume the leadership of the Congress and set their own legislative agenda for the nation. President Bill Clinton's remaining two years in the White House will be further clouded by these results. It will surprise no one if his re-election prospects are affected adversely. Even more important at this moment for his presidency,

his domestic agenda is in danger.

Will there be any change in the US policy towards Bangladesh? Personally I do not believe that the change in leadership in the Senate and the House of Representatives will have any significant impact on the US-Bangladesh relations. After all, the administration will continue to be Democratic, at least for the next couple years and I am not aware of any reason for a policy change. However, the House and Senate Foreign Aid Committees will go under the control of the Republicans and one can visualize some change of their programmes and priorities but it is too early to speculate on these possible policy changes.

contingent of newsmen, and TV cameramen dog the steps of an assortment of characters. They are accurately described as the Turkish Paparazzi. 'Civangate' has nearly relegated the crisis within the Turkish coalition, which has come perilously close to breaking up, to second place.

'Civangate' has reached the widow of late President Turgut Ozal, a first such event in the 70-year history of the Turkish Republic. Six months ago when Istanbul Water Department scandal known as 'Iskigate' broke out it was very big news and led to the downfall of Istanbul Mayor, Nurettin Sozen, although he was not directly involved. Last night the main personality of the 'Iskigate', Director of Water Works Department Ergun Goknel, was sentenced to 8 years in jail and the event went almost unnoticed. The tentacles of 'Civangate' are spreading to high places. Dramatic daily revelations are whetting popular appetite. At this rate it is hard to foretell where it may all lead to.

OPINION

Non-competitive BTV's Image

Alif Zabr

I would not like to work in the news section of the BTV, the state-controlled television network, because one vital ingredient is missing there which makes life tick — motivation. And add: job satisfaction. HMV (this master's voice) fills the stomach, and the working hours, but does not appease the hunger (of divine discontent, may be).

The news editors and staff there are not that native that they cannot distinguish the difference between news, publicity and propaganda — the latter of the two in its crudest form.

I find that as a thinking citizen, I can do without this national state electronic media. That is a good topic for research by the private sector media specialists (if any, and interested in the project/thesis) as the public sector researchers won't touch it even with a pair of tongs.

When a medium becomes non-indispensable to a target (the listener, viewer or the reader), that medium is dead for that target. Now I have the choice, I can find what I want, and get it easily, at a cost I can afford, and without wasting time. Multiply this factor by

several million targets, and you know what's wrong with the BTV (or RB) news presentations or re-presentations: when it arrogantly defines and propagates views as news.

BTV has lost its credibility; or its has eroded so much that it has become noticeable. The slip is showing. Correction: may be these days the fashion is to reveal the slip. The News staff are not to blame. A human mind cannot be used like a machine, robot, or automation (look what happened to communism). A creative and reactive organism has to be treated as such, be it a PRO or a parrot. A computer, for example, is not such a creature.

I sometimes wonder what would the TV screen show when one day no Minister opens his mouth. And why this obsession with this and that "Day", "Week", and "anniversary"? How much footage the other national networks devote to this pastime can be easily monitored by the viewers. Then there are obituaries at non-VIP and non-national level in the national bulletins. Perhaps the Local News will carry an unknown Bangladeshi's ob.

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.

New electricity poles at Wari

Sir, Some 8-9 years back the steel made, thinner and smaller diameter electricity poles were replaced with a bit thicker and bigger diameter poles at Wari. Now again the electric poles have been replaced with concrete made electric poles. We wonder why so frequent removal and replacement of electric poles? And at what cost and for how much longevity?

The new concrete poles have been installed digging 3-4 feet deep holes near the road side drains. Some poles stand straight but some seem leaning.

We feel that the 3-4 feet deep base hole of each newly installed concrete poles should be properly filled in with concrete and other materials to keep them erect for the sake of safety as well as a trouble free service.

We would also like to mention here that it has been an errant supply of electricity at Wari, Narinda, Swamibagh, Gopibagh, Hatkhola and Tipu

Sultan Road area and many other parts in Old Dhaka for years together.

Would the authorities concerned look into the matter, take necessary steps and mitigate the sufferings of the people without further wastage of time?

O H Kabir
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Guest birds

Sir, It is said that thousands, may be millions, of migratory birds come to our land at the advent of every winter. These migratory birds have earned a respectable name — "guest birds".

Some of these birds are hunted by the gunman, and some are caught in traps or nets, and sold to the city elites. These unfortunate birds, as your editorial (30 October, '94) says, "would go down the gullet of the delicacy-hungry urban orbes". This is true. Every year our ornithologists and bird-lovers appear in the field to plead for the guest birds and usually say that the guest birds are natural assets,

and they add seasonal beauty to our environment, etc. etc.

Birds in flocks, especially in the sanctuaries, surely make an eye-catching phenomenon. But we also get contrary reports that every year these migratory birds cause damage to our crops in different areas of Bangladesh. No one however, has yet given us a true picture as to the extent of damage done to our crops by the so-called guest birds. Nor do we have a correct figure as to the number of guest birds killed every year in Bangladesh.

As I have observed in Dhaka, it may be a thousand guest birds that are sold in different areas of Dhaka. But the claim of the bird-lovers is that a million guest birds are being killed every year in Bangladesh. I am a layman, and not an ornithologist, nor can I claim myself to be a bird-lover. But, I am certainly not a bird-hater either. I have not tasted the flesh of any game-bird or guest bird so far. But I feel it not so illogical if at least some 'halal' eatable guest birds which damage our crops in the fields and consume fish from our rivers, bils and haors every year — are contained anyway.

I guess that the bird-lovers will be shocked at my logic. I do not have any idea as to the number of species of the guest birds that visit Bangladesh are "halal". But I believe that only a minute fraction of the millions of guest birds are killed every year in Bangladesh. The situa-

tion is not so much alarming.

However, to make an end to the guest bird flurry, I would like to suggest the following to our ornithologists and bird-lovers to ascertain — the number of guest birds sold this year in Dhaka streets; the approximate number of guest birds that visit Bangladesh a years' extent of damage done to our crops by the guest birds every year; the amount of droppings we get every year to enrich our soil and the amount of fish gulped down by the guest birds every year from our waterbodies.

Such information, if gathered, would certainly enlighten our people and help them to have a reasonable view about the guest birds.

M Abdur Rasul
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Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Political crisis

Sir, At present the country is passing through a critical political crisis. It is honestly expected that all the quarters will act with due patriotic zeal keeping the national interest above all sorts of political and party interests. Let Bangladesh move ahead for achieving progress and prosperity as it is one moving since restoration of democracy in the country. Let us act only in that direction.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof. BAI, Dhaka