

FOCUS

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Heir to Camelot, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Jr. Ends His Life at Sea

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

On Saturday, July 17, the writer got up early to watch live coverage of Tiger Woods playing golf at the British Open. Of course, there was no coverage of golf; instead ABC television, like all other TV networks, was covering the disappearance of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s plane near Martha's Vineyard, live. Immediately, I knew that all the three passengers — JFK Jr., his wife Carolyn and sister-in-law Lauren Bessette — were dead. The impact of a plane crash at sea is not much different than on land.

While the rest of the world came to the same conclusion right away, the American media refused to acknowledge the obvious, and desperately kept the hope afloat for two full days. (Was that to keep viewers glued to television?) So, the scion of America's foremost political family, a product of the union of the powerful Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys of Boston, both of whom fled the Irish potato famine of the 1850s to found America's unofficial royal family — is gone. For ever!

The world first saw the photograph of 2-year-old JFK Jr. (he was erroneously labeled "John John" by a reporter who heard President Kennedy chase after his son shouting, "John, John") in 1963, peering out under the Presidential desk as President Kennedy attended to business on it. Jackie Kennedy, who was away and who guarded her children's privacy zealously, was furious! She extracted a promise from JFK never to subject the children to publicity again. JFK did not have much time left to keep that promise. JFK Jr. will forever remain etched in America's (and the world's) memory as the little boy, unaware of what had happened, standing by and saluting his father's casket in November, 1963.

Jackie Kennedy ran into financial difficulties after President Kennedy's death. The money the Kennedy family offered her was not enough to bring Caroline and John Jr. up the way she wanted. It was because of this Jackie agreed to marry Aristotle Onassis, the Greek shipping magnate, who was wooing her. President Kennedy's younger brother, Robert Kennedy, was vehemently opposed to the wedding. When Robert Kennedy himself was assassinated in June, 1968, while running for President, the way was cleared. Senator Edward Kennedy made Aristotle Onassis agree to a series of prenuptial agreements, before allowing the marriage to proceed. One condition was: "no children." Jackie was only 38 in 1968. At that wedding in October 1968, the world caught a glimpse of Caroline and John Jr., again, with Caroline looking inquisitively at Aristotle Onassis. The marriage of convenience (Aristotle Onassis always referred to Jackie as "the widow") ended with Aristotle Onassis's death in 1975.

The writer remembers JFK Jr. visiting Muhammad Ali's dressing room before a fight in 1974. The Kennedys were big on sports. President Kennedy played American football and was a huge fan of boxing and sailing. After finishing school at Phillips Academy, JFK Jr. bucked the family trend of going to Harvard and attended Brown University instead in 1979, graduating in 1983. He then completed law school at New York University.

Americans had their first glimpse of the grown up 27-year-old JFK Jr. at the 1988 Democratic convention in Atlanta, where he received a 2-minute standing ovation after his short speech. Dashing and more handsome than his dad, JFK Jr. was quickly labeled "the sexiest man alive" by People magazine. Tabloids had a shorter version: "Hunk." When JFK Jr. failed his New York Bar examination, the caption in one New York tabloid was: "Hunk Flunks." JFK Jr. passed at his third attempt was made a name for himself as Assistant District Attorney in Manhattan by winning convictions in all the six cases he tried.

Although they grew up in the bowlful of celebrity, it is remarkable that JFK Jr. and Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg grew up to be so normal. Unlike Robert Kennedy's sons, two of whom died because of a drug overdose and reckless driving, JFK Jr. did not do drugs or alcohol, nor had any trouble with the law. The only semblance of recklessness demonstrated by JFK Jr. was his dalliance with actress Daryl Hannah and singer Madonna, both of which Jackie disapproved. It had to be in the Kennedy genes. After all, President Kennedy's indiscretions with actresses, especially Marilyn Monroe, and grand dad Joseph Kennedy's trysts with actress Gloria Swanson are well known. In 1996, JFK Jr. married Carolyn Bessette, his "soul mate" who rivals Jackie in elegance and grace. Two years ago, JFK Jr. took a shot at his erring cousins: "They are poster boys for bad behaviour," he said. That ticked off Congressman Joe Kennedy, who retorted by satirizing his famous uncle's famous inaugural speech: "Ask not what you can do for your country, ask what you can do for George."

"George" was a magazine that JFK Jr. launched in 1995. He had discussed the concept of "George" — a political-celebrity magazine with an air of "cultural barometer" — with and obtained the approval of Jackie, before a writer and editor, before Jackie passed away in 1994. JFK Jr. knew that any political magazine of his was bound to be labeled "liberal"; therefore he published regular columns by very conservative Republicans such as William F. Buckley and former Senator Alfonso D'Amato of New York in "George." An examination of the current issue of "George" will explain why it was fast.

President Kennedy liked the sea. He sailed a lot on it. "We (human beings) came from the sea," he used to say. That is why many Kennedy homes — at Hyannis Port and Martha's Vineyard — are by the sea. That is where he probably met up with his only son.

becoming a popular magazine (circulation: 400,000). The cover features Mexican actress Salma Hayek of the film "Wild Wild West" with the caption: "Latin Heat! Salma and the new Latino power brokers are making America sizzle." It had an exclusive: "Linda Tripp's children speak out." Another piece reviewed "Campaign 2000: Who the hell is Bob Smith?" An article addressed: "Who is the best Mayor in the USA?" One piece dealt with the music of pop icon Bob Dylan. Finally, comedian Steve Martin wrote a feature on "How to adopt a Kosovo refugee."

The political magazine "George" was supposed to be JFK Jr.'s launching pad to politics. People had begged him to run for Congressman, Senator, Mayor (of New York City, where he lived) and Governor. Rumour has it that he was considering a run for the Senate from New York before Hillary Clinton made her intentions known. People had asked JFK Jr. repeatedly whether knowing what we know now about his father's personal life, would President Kennedy have run for public office in the present era. "Absolutely not!" JFK Jr. would reply. JFK Jr. says that he remembers very little; if anything, of the first three years of his life at the White House. And he categorically stated that he has no interest in his father's personal life, would President Kennedy have run for public office in the present era.

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Neither will JFK Jr. Caroline and JFK Jr. were planning to have a baby. JFK Jr. even had a name in mind if it was a boy, very Irish "Flynn." Carolyn did not quite like it! Now they will have no progeny. There will be no lineage to President Kennedy from his son's side. Nobody will carry the Kennedy name that refers to the former President.

Things started going horribly wrong on Friday afternoon, July 16. JFK Jr., who had graduated from pilot cycles to flying, and received his license only 15 months ago, was scheduled to fly his powerful, two-engine Piper Saratoga from Fairfield, New Jersey, about 50 miles from Martha's Vineyard with his wife and sister-in-law on board. After dropping Lauren off, John and Carolyn were supposed to fly to Hyannis Port for the wedding of Robert Kennedy's youngest

daughter, Rory. Ethel Kennedy was pregnant with Rory, when Bobby was assassinated in 1968.

JFK Jr. is not certified as an instrument pilot, he can fly only during day time. Indeed, the plan was to fly day time. But Lauren, who works in New York City, was late getting out of work, and was further delayed by Friday afternoon traffic. When they were ready to take off, it was 8:38 P.M. John Jr. is supposed to be a very careful pilot. He never flew at night without a flight instructor. On Friday, his flight instructor was away on vacation. It is a mystery why he took off in the

freight a visitor to the family as fame. On June 5, 1968, Senator Robert Kennedy, who would have been President, was gunned down in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. He was only 42. Just over a year later, on July 19, 1969, Senator Ted Kennedy left a party on Chappaquiddick island off Martha's Vineyard, and drove his car off a small wooden bridge. He survived, but his campaign aide Mary Jo Kopechne drowned. That ensured that Ted Kennedy would never be President.

Although extremely rich

(through Joseph Kennedy's illegal bootlegging during Prohibition, critics say), Kennedy's are the first whites to connect with American blacks. Blacks voted in record numbers in 1960 to elect President Kennedy, who had planned to enact the Civil Rights legislation in his second term. In 1962, President Kennedy sent Federal troops to Alabama to escort the first black student, James Meredith, to the University of Alabama past the defiant governor of the state, George Wallace. Robert Kennedy was the last white politician who could have scolded the blacks (which he almost did when blacks rioted after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April, 1968) and still retain their affection. John Jr. was the same. He helped build school for inner city blacks, worked tirelessly and anonymously for charities. He was upset at the enormous media coverage of Princess Diana's death, and the lack of it for the advocate of the poor, Mother Teresa.

Weekend trips in private planes such as JFK Jr.'s have become a symbol of freedom for a growing number of fast-moving Americans. They are the Minivans and the SUV's (sport utility vehicles) of the air. They offer the thrill of flight and the freedom of coming and going wherever and whenever one pleases. But sometimes they can be more difficult to fly than a commercial aircraft. Most general aviation flight are conducted under visual flight rules. Pilots navigate using landmarks on the ground, and scan the sky to avoid other airplanes.

Flying without being able to see the horizon is completely different. Once in clouds, fog or dense haze,

the writer did not pay much attention to JFK Jr. Honestly, I was quite upset at the gory press details of his sexual relations with Madonna. Now that he is gone, the heart aches. What makes the Kennedys unique is not that they die; but that they die so young! So many promises remain unfulfilled.

Why could they not be like Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, who lived to be 105? "Luck of the Irish" seem to apply to only the Fitzgeralds, not the Kennedys. The world should be grateful that Jackie was not alive to bury her son. Now only one — Caroline, who was JFK Jr.'s best friend — remains to carry on with a grossly distorted Camelot.

No, there is no curse on the Kennedy family. Death during war is normal. In a gun-toting society like America, public life exposes politicians to mortal dangers. It is worth remembering that President Kennedy had humiliated the Soviets during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, and that Lee Harvey Oswald had just returned from Soviet Union before assassinating Kennedy. As Attorney General under his brother, Robert Kennedy took on and harassed the boss of the powerful teamsters union, Jimmy Hoffa. The Kennedy's rattled too many cages and had enemies in too many high places. But then, the Kennedy clan always took chances and lived on the brink. Otherwise, why would a smart young man take off for the unknown on a foggy night. God does not micromanage human life: human beings have free will to do good or evil, smart or dumb acts.

Before we start feeling sorry for the Kennedys, let us remember that what matriarch of the family Rose Kennedy, who passed away in 1995, once said. She believed that were her children and grand children to be given a second chance, they would have lived life exactly the same way. They lived life dangerously and to the fullest; longevity for its own sake did not appeal to them. And President Kennedy had said: "To whom much is given, much is expected."

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Liberation and Beyond by J N Dixit

(The Daily Star is serialising extracts from the book through exclusive contract with University Press Limited (UPL), publisher of its Bangladesh edition).

**1974: The Fragmentation of Bangladeshi Politics** Part-III

MENTION has already been made of the infrastructural and human resource shortcomings which affected Bangladesh's economy. The point to note is that the Nixon Administration continued a policy of distance and pressure on Bangladesh for more than two years after its liberation. Apart from the personal frustration and pique that Nixon felt with the liberation of Bangladesh against his opposition and because of his abortive advocacy with the Soviet Union to restrain India, the US had other motives to pursue negative policies towards Bangladesh. It wanted to use economic pressure to achieve several political goals to help Pakistan. The first was the repatriation of Pakistani prisoners of war; second that the war crimes trial was not held. The third objective was that India returns the territory it had captured in West Pakistan. Bangladesh joining the non-aligned movement immediately after liberation, Mujib proclaiming socialism as the governing principle of his economic policies and close economic and political relations with India all added up to the US's pronounced antagonism towards Bangladesh.

US antagonism found express in hurting Bangladesh where it hurt most. Bangladesh agriculture stood disrupted at the end of the liberation war the country did not have sufficient foreign exchange reserves to import food at commercial rates. There was a continuing shortage of foodgrains to meet the requirements of the rising population. The US decided to withhold grain shipments to Bangladesh under its Food Aid Programme between February and April 1974 on the ground that Bangladesh had entered into an agreement to sell jute to Cuba late in 1972 and early the next year. This was a blatantly punitive action, an act of deliberate inflexibility because it was known that US trade policy on such issues was in fact flexible.

While a hungry Bangladesh was denied food aid, Dr. Henry Kissinger directed the US Department of Commerce to waive Cuba-related stipulations in US trade laws to allow food supplies to Egypt. Egypt received US food aid even though it had a much larger trading connection with Cuba than Bangladesh and a food requirements being much lesser than those of Bangladesh. The US did not stop at this. I recall Bangladesh authorities mentioning to Sukhamay Chakravorty, Member of India's Planning Commission that the US had influenced other grain suppliers from Western Europe and Australia not to give credits to

Student leader and political assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tofael Ahmed (right) at a reception, 1973

Bangladesh for the import of food. Even ships which were expected to carry foodgrain to Bangladesh before the US's restrictive order came were asked not to sail for Chittagong. Anticipating the impending shortage of foodgrain, traders in Bangladesh withheld grain from the market and from the public sector food distribution system. There was an unmanageable rise in foodgrain prices by the middle of 1974. It was exacerbated by a sharp decline in the food stocks with government distribution agencies. The result was the famine in Bangladesh in 1974. The rural population was the most adversely affected by the crisis which, in turn, vitiated the political atmosphere. Private traders from West Bengal and Assam took advantage of the situation and indulged in unfair trade with the connivance of similarly motivated Bangladeshi traders. The Bangladeshi players in this game operated in tandem with their counterparts in India, but did not hesitate to promote provocative criticism of India when the situation for them vis-a-vis the Bangladesh authorities became too hot for comfort.

The Government of India and governments of West Bengal and Assam could not totally control the illegal trading activities of Indian traders despite best efforts. Apart from the media's political accusations against India for treating Bangladesh as a client state, there were allegations that India was planning to destroy Bangladesh's jute, tea and textile industries. I recall several emotional and highly provocative tirades along these lines by Enayatullah Khan, Editor of the left-leaning weekly, Holiday, at my residence even on social occasions. By the autumn of 1974, goodwill towards India and the euphoria over the liberation

struggle had disappeared. The media and political opinion outlets reverted to the mindset of the days when Bangladesh was "East Pakistan." Political trends generated by Bhutto's visit strengthened these negative undercurrents in Indo-Bangladesh relations. India viewed these developments as objectively as it could and dealt with them patiently, but sections of the Indian public opinion began to react critically to Bangladesh's attitude. The failure to resolve the Farakka issue, the on-going controversies over the transfer of enclaves, demarcation of the maritime boundary and ownership of the New Moore islands and Bangladeshi political and economic criticism of India together generated negative reactions in India. Questions were raised about the ingratiation of Bangladesh for India's sacrifices and support to the liberation of Bangladesh. The old antagonistic feelings against Bangladesh in West Bengal and Assam re-emerged, particularly in West Bengal. Mujib's failure or unwillingness to control the anti-Indian diatribes in the Bangladeshi media and statements by various political parties compounded the crisis, and evoked a counter response in the Indian media.

Mrs. Gandhi's attention on Bangladesh was distracted by internal developments in India which challenged her authority. The case against her election to the Lok Sabha had commenced at the Allahabad High Court over a complaint about electoral malpractice filed by Socialist leader Raj Narain. Jayaprakash Narayan had already launched his anti-Indira Gandhi campaign through his Nava Nirman movement. She was getting enmeshed in domestic crisis which ultimately led her to declare a state of emergency in June 1975.

Indo-Bangladesh relations were in a negative drift from the second half of 1974. The famine and the general economic crisis in Bangladesh led to heightened political tension and opposition to Mujib. Levels of political violence increased. Violence perpetrated by extreme leftists as well as the Islamic parties became common place. Communal disturbances between Hindus and Muslims reappeared after a gap of nearly a decade. Durga Puja was disrupted, the Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka was threatened and the Durga Puja celebrations of 1974.

Factionalism within the Awami League started affecting Sheikh Mujib's political credibility. Mujib felt that he had to take some radical steps to regain control over the situation. His perception was that the Awami League was losing grassroots support, that its domination of the Bangladesh Parliament was not providing enough political space to other parties to participate in the system of governance. He felt that the political violence indulged in by opposition parties was a direct consequence of the above limitations. He therefore came to the conclusion that the Awami League should be replaced by a new political entity which would absorb all other parties of Bangladesh with a broader, eclectic and flexible political programme and ideology. While the Awami League would form the core of this new political organisation it would invite the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) to join this party. In the even, he dissolved the Awami League and organised a new political party called the Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BKSAL) by the end of 1974.

Apart from negotiating with the JSD and the CPB, Mujib tried to persuade other leftist parties led by Toha, Rashed Khan Menon and Kazi Zafar. He secured the support of veteran political leaders like Maulana Bhashani and Ataur Rahman in this venture. He asserted that BKSAL was the recreation of a grand national coalition of Bangladesh, which would be the main instrument for national consolidation and reconstruction.

Mujib declared that Bangladesh would be a one-party state. He had taken the first step to abandon his longstanding commitment to a multi-party parliamentary democracy. By now, he had removed Tajuddin Ahmed from Cabinet and marginalised other ministers of the Mujibnagar Government from mainstream politics. He began to rely increasingly on his nephew, Sheikh Moni, his brother-in-law, Serniabat and subservient members of the Bangladesh bureaucracy. On all counts, he had little time for the professionally competent and upright members of his civil service. His basic vision of a truly democratic Bangladesh, however, remained a factor in this thinking. The vision was to recreate Bangladesh into a truly decentralised democracy. While he felt that the multi-party system should be replaced by a single party at the macro-political level to give coherent orientation to efforts on national consolidation, he felt that rural communities and local self-governing bodies should be empowered as building blocks of the Bangladeshi democracy. The central point of the BKSAL platform was to build rural cooperatives. There would be joint cultivation of land; the division of produce would be equitable, one-third going to the owners of the land, one-third being allotted to actual cultivators and the rest going to the state. He also decided that the unit of administration, the old districts inherited from the colonial times, should be changed. Power was to be decentralised. The existing districts were disbanded. The country was to be divided into 52 sub-divisions with each sub-division being re-designated as a district. Each of these districts was to be administered by a District Governor who would be a political appointee. Permanent civil services would play a subordinate role. Conscious that this would generate resentment in the bureaucracy, Sheikh Mujib Rahman declared that members of the civil services and the armed forces would be free to join BKSAL and as party members chances for playing a higher role in administration would be available to them. The distinction between the institutional apparatus of the state and political party was to be eliminated.

(Continued)

Economic Theories Inconsistent with Socio-economic Environment

by M Naved Ferdous Iqbal

"**W**HAT are people operating in financial markets paid for more than school teachers or academic economists?" There are answers to this question, but none of them involves the fundamental principle of supply and demand. Indeed orthodox economics is quite unable to answer a simple question such as this, except by resorting to definitions of supply, demand and price that degenerate into meaningless tautology.

Paul Ormerod at the British Association in 1992 charges Economics of being unable to offer explanations for commonplace behaviour. He also claims that the ability of economists to predict economic variables, which must surely be the main justification for the pervasive influence of economics upon public policy, has been thrown into serious doubt.

The discipline of economics has therefore been subject to constant criticism not only from outside the discipline, but also by economists themselves. Yet these criticisms, why has nothing changed? Probably the lack of realism in economics is a defensive strategy, which has been invoked to avoid the political conclusions to which economic theories would otherwise lead. This in turn has resulted in orthodox economics, which is at best useless and worst vacuous.

The starting point of the argument holds that Economics, regarded as an empirical science which enables us to understand and predict economic behaviour, contradicts the actual policy recommendations which economists arrive at.

The economic theories aimed at economic restructuring are all encompassed by political and environmental condition of constraints.

appropriate for the present economic environment.

From the perspective of laissez-faire, economics, which is also regarded as a neutral science, is actually partly partial and thereby contradicts the total concept of laissez-faire itself. Adam Smith assumed the enemy of human freedom at that time to be the state — the internationalist, the mercantilistic government that imposed tariffs, granted monopolies, levied taxes and above all sought to improve what was best left to itself. He felt that free competition could exist only if the government follows a policy of laissez-faire, which encourages government to leave business and on rare occasions, in order to prevent monopolies should laissez-faire government interfere with the operation of the economy. Instead, the economy is guided by the invisible hand of competition. This was the key to Smith's philosophy: if government stayed out of the economy and allowed businesses and consumers to pursue their own interests, competition among producers would keep prices low, while generating the goods demanded by consumers.

Now the contradiction is however the claim that a neutral science can be concerned with prediction and control. This specification for science is itself non-neutral, since the very idea that economics should be employed for control is a political statement totally contradicting the concept of laissez-faire. Therefore in order for positive economists to justify laissez-faire, they have to substantiate three arguments:

* That the economic data are only available at the individual level.

* That these data are capable

