The Next President of Turkey

There is great excitement in Turkey regarding the election of the tenth President. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and rise of Turkic states, Turkey has emerged from the periphery of Europe to a central position on the map of the world. With the election of Sezer it would seem that the debate on presidential versus parliamentary democracy is due to open.

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

FOR all practical purposes Ahmet Necdet Sezer was elected the tenth President of Turkey on Monday, May 1. He will take oath of office on May 16, 2000.

It was the second round of presidential election of Turkey. On the first round held on 27 April last although Sezer had polled the highest number of votes, he was unable to cross the barrage. Out of a 550-member Assembly Sezer has polled 281 votes and his nearest rival the Islamist Virtue Party candidate Nevzat Yalcintash had polled 61 votes. In Monday's poll Sezer increased his lead to 314 votes thus virtually assuring his election to the exalted office of President. In the second round his nearest rival was Yildirim Akbulut, the Speaker of the Assembly, who polled 88 votes.

The present polls necessitate a third round, which will be held on 5 May. That vote will be nerely a formality because the winner will need a simple majority, that is 276 votes. In the first two rounds two thirds majority, that is 367 votes are needed. Since no candidate reached that figure there is need for a third round. In the first round there were 11 candidates and with withdrawals, it came down to eight in the second round. Since Sezer has increased his lead significantly, it can be safely predicted that he will be elected president.

Whereas all the candidates are members of the National Assembly, Ahmet Necdet Sezer is an outsider and currently holds the post of President of the Constitutional Court. After a long illustrious stretch of stay in the Judiciary, he reached the summit of his career two years ago. He thus resembles Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's choice of former Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

The current President Suleyman Demirel is completing his seven years in office on 15 May. The Turkish Constitution does not allow a second term to the President. A very strong campaign was mounted by Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit to amend the Constitution and extend the tenure of Demirel. The attempt failed because the two thirds majority was not available within the Parliament, although Demirel has been a highly successful President remaining scrupulously neutral and above controversy.

An attempt to find a candidate within the Parliament also failed as the coalition partners were unable to agree on a single candidate. There is a coalition government in Turkey composed of Democratic Left Party of Ecevit, National Movement Party of Davlet Bahceli and Motherland Party of Mesut Yilmaz. The coalition partners in desperation turned to the President of the Constitutional Court and the three parties agreed to nominate him as their joint candidate. Then the three coalition partners approached the two opposition parties, namely the Islamist Virtue Party of Recai Kutan and the True Path Party of former lady prime minister Tansu Ciller. Going before TV cameras the five leaders signed the candidature of Ahmet Necdet Sezer and the event created a big stir inside Turkey.

The fact that the candidate is the President of the Constitutional Court has been warmly acclaimed throughout Europe and the USA. Sezer is considered an asset because of his background specially the contribution that he is expected to make in the field of democratisation and human rights.

Although the three coalition partners selected Sezer, he appears to be closest to Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit. Both have an incorruptible image. Both believe in modest living and high thinking. Ecevit refuses to ride the Prime Minister's Mercedes and lives in a modest flat. The next President of Turkey's father was a primary school teacher and so is his wife, who supplements her income with private lessons.

A week ago when MPs were voting to elect the tenth President of Turkey, Ahmet Necdet Sezer was presiding over the anniversary clebrations of his Constitutional Court. His most significant comment was the powers of the President. He spoke in favour of curtailing those powers. Although the system in Turkey is parliamentary democracy, the President enjoys extensive powers like an array of important appointments. The President also presides over the Natonal Security Council, where the armed forces have a commanding position. The National Security Council is not an accountable institution. Sezer advocated in his speech that the decisions of the National Security Council should be presented for people's sanction.

The next President of Trkey, Ahmet Necdet Sezer comes from the small town of Afyon and studied in the secondary school called Afyon Lycee. Suleyman Demirel is also a student of Afyon Lycee. There is great excitement in Turkey regarding the election of the tenth President. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and rise of Turkic states, Turkey has emerged from the periphery of Europe to a central position on the map of the world. She is rapidly adding economic muscle. Throughout history she has relied on forceful leaders at the top. With the election of Sezer it would seem that the debate on presidential versus parliamentary democracy is due to open.

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY

Needed Frontal Assault

by A.H. Jaffor Ullah

THIS writeup is an attempt best to bridge the gap between the artistry of a poetic world and mundaneness of the mercantile world. These two antagonistic worlds can exist side by side in harmony with each other. Our civil society could prosper economically and at the same time keep our environment in pristine shape. For this to happen we need some visionary leaders. But before discussing that why not let us probe into the hopeless quagmire our motherland is in now as it relates to our decaying environment.

Think for a moment if poet Jibanananda Das were to reappear in Bangladesh now, would he be able to write a sequel to his masterpiece "Ruposhi Bangla?" With great exasperation I found out, while visiting Paharpur, Mahastangar, and vicinity in the summer of '95, that "Ruposhi Bangla" is no longer that alluring or seductive anymore!

Tell me please, what has gone wrong with our society and in our land in recent days. With great lamentation, I have to tell you that I did not find the unspoiled beauty that was once the hallmark of rural Bangladesh. This is the same beauty that Jibanananda Das, Tagore, Nazrul, Madhusudan Datta and all depicted so exuberantly and eloquently in their literary works.

Overcrowding and overpopulation have taken their tolls on the inherent beauty of our land. The harmony that has existed between man and nature for over hundreds of years has been broken in recent days. The other day I read news in the Internet about dead fish being scattered all over a small section of river in some area of rural Bangladesh. The authorities speculate fouling of the water by a fertilizer factory upstream the river. Haphazard industrialization is taking its toll in our natural resources.

Bangladesh is endowed with so many faunas and floras that one considers the country's greatest wealth. The region had these resources because of its unusual geographic location. The Gangetic delta being under the spell of tropical monsoon from June through November receives quite a bit of rain. Westerners visiting Bangladesh during the monsoon months are fascinated with the iridescence of our dazzling greenery. As a child growing up in the fifties in northern suburb of Dhaka encompassing Tejgaon, Farmgate, Kawran Bazaar, and the vicinity, I witnessed the splendor of our evergreen foliages. Whatever has happened to those thickets, shrubs, and trees? Dhaka has been transformed from a sun-swept island of foliages into a concrete jungle. In my last visit to Dhaka I hardly saw any dragonfly or butterfly that were abundant even in the sixties. The sad part is that even the ubiquitous crows that we considered the permanent fixture of our urban life is all but gone. Without leaving any clues, they have vanished into the thin air. I simply wonder, what went wrong with our urban sprawls?

You will be surprised to know that near Dhaka Medical College in Ramna we had thriving Segun (teak) trees. Remember, there is such a place adjacent to Dhaka's secretariat called 'Segun Bagicha,' meaning teak garden. I think all of those Segun trees were nothing but relics even in the fifties. During Ayub Khan's time in mid-sixties, to our horror we found that the authorities in Dhaka were very eager to cut those remaining Segun trees in the university area. In the name of "development," the Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) had to remove those precious trees — also from the street running between Ramna Park and Suhrawardy Uddyan. It is disheartening to know that it took more than one hundred years for a solitary Segun seedling to reach its majestic height, but in a matter of hours, there was no trace of the tree on the ground.

> What Bangladesh now needs is growth-oriented economic plan. The plan has to be home brewed and less dependent on the World Bank (WB) and IMF experts who are too eager to tell our economists what to do and what not to do. The protesters in Seattle and Washington D.C. have some strong messages for the powerhouse of world's monetary organizations.

We ought to be concerned with the vanishing local floras like Aswatha, Bot, Shimul, Tomal, Hijol, Kewra, etc., from our rural landscapes. Bio-diversity should be considered as important as other significant ecological factor like pollution free air. In a way, the density of arbors with profuse foliage is linked to the air quality of a region. The trees suck up excess carbon dioxide from air to make simple sugars for their own use by photosynthesis. You will be surprised to know that the electric utility companies in the northeast USA care about the rain forests located as far away as Malaysia and Indonesian Islands. They reason that more trees in Asia mean less carbon dioxide in earth's atmosphere. Thus, trees work as a carbon dioxide sink; without tree earth's biosphere would have so much carbon dioxide that the "Greenhouse Effect" would set in earnest causing temperature to rise a few degrees. This may allow the polar ice cap to melt prematurely causing the rise of sea level and widespread flooding of the coastal plains. This rather dire prediction does not bode well for an overpopulated coastal nation such as Bangladesh.

Could Bangladesh do something to prevent this doomsday scenario? The nation should follow the recommendations of International Biospheric Society and other ecological societies to undertake a massive reforestation programme. Yes, we need more lands to boost production of foodstuff, but not at the cost of global warming. As a country, Bangladesh should move towards manufacturing. The world needs all kinds of manufactured goods. People's Republic of China is now manufacturing dolls and other mundane low-technology products for the West. If we go that route, then with excess foreign currency we can buy our staples from countries like Canada, America, Australia, etc., the present day granary of the world. And yes, nowhere is it written that Bangladesh ought to be one of those sweatshops of the Third World countries.

The impoverished nation should slowly crawl towards Information Technology area. We have many smart kids in the colleges who could write million lines of zeroes and ones for American and European software companies. And yes, they pay rather well as compared to the girls who toil in the sweatshops for a meager income. The nation certainly could break the cycle of poverty but for that we need visionary leaders. We do not have to poison our environment to achieve prosperity.

From economic standpoint, Bangladesh is always struggling as a nation since its birth in 1971. It has always been in the camp of least developing nations. I am afraid the nation will remain so unless things change drastically very soon. The myopic views of Bangladesh's leaders took its toll on economy. Many of them who showed up either through adult suffrage or barrel of guns have proved to be lacking vision and fortitude to lead this nation of 100 million plus people for the last three decades. Bangladesh's government-run enterprises were on the red and constantly hemorrhaging and dragging with them the entire economy while the Keynesian economists who were advising the government wrote in florid language the successes of first five-year plan, second-five year plan, so on, and so forth. Our economists took the Keynesian model to the extent that resulted in the proliferation of huge bureaucracy-laden semi-autonomous organization in the agricultural and industrial sector.

What Bangladesh now needs is growth-oriented economic plan. The plan has to be home brewed and less dependent on the World Bank (WB) and IMF experts who are too eager to tell our economists what to do and what not to do. The protesters in Seattle and Washington D.C. have some strong messages for the powerhouse of world's monetary organizations. The other night in the second week of April 2000, head of the WB said on American TV that he listened what the protesters had to say clearly. The WB and IMF were busily looking into the interests of the G-7 nations. The least developing nations were increasingly becoming pawns in the hands of the lenders. If these organizations have their way, most countries as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, and others like them who have a surplus labour would become sweatshops of the world. Therefore, the protestors were screaming that 'Globalization' as we know of it in the West is not working properly. The West is practically sucking the least developing nations. Under this new scheme of 'Globalization,' the West would prosper at the expense of the least-developed nations. One may call this line of demarcation — the digital divide. As I have mentioned earlier, Bangladesh should move away from being the sweatshop bloc of the world to the "New Economy" bloc country. Bangladesh has both abundant labour force and fossil fuel. With reforms in bureaucracy and political system, the country may make a stride in the right direction and may even become a dominant player in South Asia.

With a sound blueprint at hand, Bangladesh should be able to come out of the present quagmire and manage her economy and environment profitably. The country has to go into transition mode. The politicians and civic leaders should know this very well. Tide and time wait for none. And time is the essence. It will be too late if Bangladesh's political leaders still squabble in public over who wronged whom. A healthy debate over what steps the civil society could take to diffuse political feuds among quarrelsome politicians may sound like the tall order of the day.

While the politicians may find it inevitable to sort out their differences, the nation may very well move forward to reduce air pollution in the urban sprawls. Our city planners in Dhaka, Chittagong and elsewhere should make an honest attempt to put arboreal support in every possible place. We should educate our masses the value of having trees in our land. If everyone works sincerely maybe it can make a difference. The choice is very clear and stark.

The author a senior research scientist in America, writes from New Orleans

GREEN POLITICS

Hammer of Thor

by Anil Agarwal

WHEN it comes to pollution control, it is only the hammer of the honourable judges of the Supreme Court that seems to push the government into doing anything. Without creating a crisis, first for the auto industry last year and now for the government, it seems that no action gets taken. Almost, as if the government has abdicated its responsibilities for pollution control and public health.

The manner is which both the state and Central governments wasted the long lead time of 22 months that the Supreme Court has given them, is truly a murky story of how politicians and bureaucrats consistently give in to industrial lobbies. The Supreme Court order dates back to July 1998 with a clear deadline — to convert all eight-year-old buses both private and that of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) to CNG. Forget public interest. It is also sad that the media has failed to draw public attention to the totally non-cooperative and obstructionist role that the Central government has played in this entire drama. The Court, too, unfortunately, tends to overlook the latter's role because the prime responsibility for carrying out the Court's instructions rightly lie with the state government.

The diesel lobby has long been opposing the Court's order to get buses converted to CNG presumably because it means entering a new line of technology and the 'cascade effect' of Supreme Court orders for Delhi which then get endorsed by the High Courts for other metros. Both DTC officials and officials of certain companies which manufacture buses have been saying for long that the CNG conversion option is too expensive and that buses with EURO II emissions standards running on 0.05 per cent sulphur diesel should be considered clean enough for Delhi. DTC wasted away the time given to it without doing anything and then filed an affidavit a few days before the deadline asking for a five-year extension in the hope that the Court would agree with the EURO II diesel option, which the DTC actually proposed in its affidavit. The collusion between the DTC and the diesel lobby could not be more self-evident.

The argument in favour of moving to CNG is very simple. The biggest pollutant in Delhi's air is small particulates and diesel buses contribute to as much as 20-25 per cent of all particulate pollution from vehicles. Moving buses to CNG, that has negligible particulate emissions, would mean a drastic reduction in this pollutant.

The diesel lobby's influence has been so powerful with the Delhi government that it has not been able to take any decision on another Supreme Court order of July 1998 which instructs it to augment its bus fleet to 10,000 by April 1, 2001. As the court had also ordered that all buses in Delhi must run on CNG by April 1, 2001, the implication of the court orders was clear. The Delhi government had to ensure that all new buses it ordered had to be running on CNG. It would be an absolute waste of money to order diesel buses and then convert them to CNG within a year or so. But the state government could not come to grips with the matter, lost in its dilemma whether it should order diesel or CNG buses. At the least, the state government could have notified private bus operators that all eight-year-old buses have to run on CNG by April 1, 2000, but this much too was not done. What we see today is the result of a total disregard for court orders and *amicus curiae* Harish Salve rightly pointed out in court that the DTC affidavit amounts to a 'contempt of court'.

Central government agencies have also tried their best to be as obstructionist as possible. Let us begin with the Ministry of Petroleum. It was only around this time last year that the ministry had told the Supreme Court that it is not possible for it to supply any better diesel than the one with 0.25 per cent sulphur content. And yet within a year the ministry has backtracked and minister Ram Naik is proudly taking out public advertisements that both petrol and diesel with 0.05 per cent sulphur content will be supplied from April 1, 2000. How does a ministry change its mind so quickly? All this has happened not just because of the growing pressure from the Supreme Court. Now that only EURO II cars are to be allowed from April 1, 2000, a court order in improvement in fuel quality was becoming inevitable. But the real pressure came with the entry of the private sector Reliance refineries, who are waiting to capture the large Delhi market by offering the desired quality of fuel. A move which put the cat amongst the coy public sector pigeons.

> Every time the Supreme Court has had to force the government to take hard decisions

Improvements in both petrol and diesel quality are vital for controlling emissions. In 1996, the Supreme Court had ordered that all new petrol cars must have catalytic convertors and asked for the introduction of unleaded petrol. But sulphur in petrol also destroys the catalyst. A cat convertor is supposed to last for 80,000 km but no manufacturer knows whether this is true or not. This is because of the poor fuel quality supplied to Indian consumers, making a mockery of Supreme Court orders. In the case of diesel, even if particulate pollution from all buses is reduced to negligible levels by moving them to CNG, there will still be many uses of diesel. Goods vehicles are heavy polluters and here the CNG option is limited because of the large volume of inter-state traffic.

Given the extremely fractured state of the country's environmental governance, the Ministry of Environment has no powers to set standards for fuel quality from the pollution point of view. In fact, even the emissions standards for vehicles are notified by the Ministry of Surface Transport (MOST) and not by the Ministry of Environment. The latter is a mere adviser. Since there were no standards for CNG buses, it was MOST that had to take the lead in this. But the ministry did nothing on its own despite the Supreme Court orders till almost a year had gone by, taking the specious plea that the state government had not asked it to do so.

Meanwhile, the Indian Institute of Petroleum refused to certify that a converted bus was not meeting the standard because no standards had been specified nor was the certification procedure. Instead of clarifying the certification procedure fast, MOST calmly took the position that the certification of converted buses was a special matter, different from the certification process for new vehicles, even though a few CNG buses were already running in Mumbai. Why couldn't the same procedure be applied to the buses for Delhi? MOST merely set up a committee to look into the matter with no deadline, totally oblivious of the Supreme Court deadline. This obviously created problems and delays for the Delhi government.

It became clear a few weeks ago where the loyalties of MOST have been all the time when it publicly stated that the CNG option is too expensive and the option of improved diesel buses should not be overlooked. Sure, cost is important, but haven't auto manufacturers also invested a lot to improve their vehicles to EURO II standards? The Western experience clearly shows that a clear environment does not come together with fancy modern technology without paying a cost or else people have to be prepared to pay the cost of death and illness in the form of doctor's fees, costs of medicines and hospital charges. But protecting the environment is not MOST responsibility so why should it care and it is not under the spotlight of the Supreme Court either.

The most retrograde position, believe it or not, has been that of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MEF). In an affidavit, filed before the Supreme Court, the ministry says that it has discussed the recommendations of the Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA), for the National Capital Region, to ban private diesel cars in order to stop new sources of particulate pollution, with MOST and the Ministry of Industry and disagrees with it. The EPCA is an agency of the ministry itself but set up under the orders of the Supreme Court and which regularly provides advice to the court. The reason cited for disagreement is that no vehicle that meets the specified emissions standards can be banned. For the MEF to disregard environmental concerns and hide behind a legal provision is outrageous. Does the ministry have any information to show that the public health effects of diesel and the actions being taking against its use from Tokyo to California can be disregarded?

And just how valid is its argument? After all, vehicular emissions standards are secondary to and derivative of air quality standards. The ministry itself has not come up with any action plan to give us clean air by controlling particulate pollution in Delhi which is its own responsibility. The Central Pollution Control Board has started measuring respirable particles (PM10) which go deep into the lungs and are a bigger threat to public health than all particles. Both in 1998 and 1999 winter, PM10 levels reached as high as 800 microgrammes per cubic meter (mg/cum) which are levels that we have not been able to find recorded in any city of the world. Whereas the standard says that it should be below 100 mg/cum. Let the ministry take up the challenge and tell the public how this particulate pollution can be controlled without controlling the use of diesel.

Moreover, all over the world, from Zurich to California, it is recognised that local situations can demand stricter standards than the national standards. Not surprisingly, the Supreme Court is imposing stricter standards for a pollution hot spot like Delhi both through stricter emissions standards as in the case of cars, and through alternative fuels for buses, autos and taxis.

It is clear that several agencies of both the Central and Delhi government have been greatly under the influence of the diesel lobby. Even Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has contributed his little bit to this state of affairs through his total inaction on the pollution front despite evidence of serious and growing air pollution in most Indian towns and cities

— CSE-Down to Earth Feature Service

Livingstone the Cheeky Puts Blair on the Spot

Ken Livingstone is one of the stormiest figures in British politics. His decision to stand for the new post of Mayor of London as an independent has set the scene for one of the bitterest election battles for years. It also says much about the state of the country's politics and Prime Minister Tony Blair's style.

Derek Ingram writes from London

IN the British political gymnasium, it is hard not to admire the starring role of Ken Livingstone.

Twenty years ago he brought down on his head the full wrath of Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party. Today he has done exactly the same with his own Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and the Labour Party.

In 1986 Thatcher was so angry she abolished London's ruling body which Livingstone had led for five years, leaving the capital without an overall administration.

Now Blair is so angry he is doing everything possible to stop Livingstone being elected the capital's first mayor and returning as leader of a new Greater London Assembly.

Livingstone has always been well on the left of the Labour Party. Cold War warrior Thatcher saw him as a neo-communist, flirting with the likes of Cuba's Fidel Castro and Northern Ireland's anti-British party, Sinn Fein.

Blair sees him as an unreconstructed politician of the Left from which Blair's new Labour Party has purged itself.

Yet Londoners love the man. He is cheeky, chirpy and charming and, many would say, introduced innovations in the running of London that have stood the test of time. The single travelcard system for both the underground railway (the Tube) and buses was his idea and is still in place.

Ken Livingstone: Ruthless and devious - or chirpy and charming?

Under Thatcher, London's much-admired public transport system decayed for lack of investment. Before the Tories lost power in 1997 they set out on the road to part-privatisation of the Tube. Labour dithered when it took over, but now plans are proceeding. Livingstone wants to stop that.

He says it would be cheaper and better to keep the Tube in one piece and raise the billions of pounds needed by issuing a public bond. Opponents argue that the process of privatisation has now gone so far that to reverse it would cost vast sums.

Now Livingstone has been cast out of the Labour Party. He sits in Parliament as an independent and will stand for the mayor's job against the official Labour candidate, former (and somewhat unimpressive) Health Secretary Frank Dobson. Opinion polls show Livingstone will win on 4 May. If he does, it will be a huge humiliation for Blair.

The Livingstone affair comes at a time when Blair's long political honeymoon seems to be ending. The setting up of a 25-member Assembly for London is part of the Labour programme of 'devolution', of which the most important planks are the new Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.

But Blair is trying to control the power even as he is devolving it and this is not proving successful. In Wales he has been forced to accept a Labour leader he did not want. In Scotland, Labour has had to share power in a coalition. And he could end up with Livingstone in London.

This is not the scene Blair wants to take to the electorate next year when he is expected to call an early election for a second term. No-one doubts that Labour will win a 2001 election with a good, if reduced, majority. Blair's nightmare is a resurgence of its left wing that may cost seats.

Livingstone is part of that nightmare. His return as mayor, it is feared, would send Middle England — as the politically centrist, economically middle-class voters are known — scurrying back to the Tories.

The new mayoralty of London is set to become a powerful political post — not to be confused with that of the Lord Mayor of London which has a centuries-old remit over only the square-mile business centre in the heart of the city.

The Blairites fear Livingstone could pack the new authority with left-wing friends. He could become a rallying point for the adherents of old Labour, who have been lying doggo around the country for years.

They see him, in the words of London's main newspaper, *The Evening Standard*, as "ruthless, devious, manipulative, unprincipled, egotistical."

Yet the extraordinary fact is that many Tories and Liberal Democrats like Livingstone and will vote for him. They remember that, regardless of the leftist political leaning of the Greater London Council in the 1980s, there was then more cohesion in the running of London and a feel for people's concerns.

— GEMINI NEWS

Garfield ® by Jim Davis

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK