

Republicans gain control of Congress

Bush's hands strengthened

GEORGE W. Bush won the November, 2000 US Presidential Election against his Democrat opponent El-Gore by a wafer-thin margin in popular vote. To top it off, the opposition Democrats were in control of the Senate. Most people thought Bush would need a good deal of bipartisan luck to push his legislative measures through.

After last Tuesday's mid-term elections, the Republican-Democrat equations in the legislature have changed. The congressional balance has tipped in favour of George Bush. The Republicans have wrested control of the Senate from the opposition Democrats and added to their majority in the House of Representatives. With 51-seat majority in the Senate and 226 seats in the House -- eight more than 218 needed to control the body -- the Republicans have seized full control of the Congress. The critical Republican dependence on Vice-President Dick Cheney's tie-breaking vote in the powerful Senate is a matter of past now.

However, the Republican's 27-21 edge in state governorships seems in for a reversal with key gains obtained by the Democrats in the large states of Pennsylvania, Illinois and Michigan among the 36 gubernatorial positions up for grabs.

In the US electoral history seldom has a party in power fared well in mid-term polls. In fact, the party in White House invariably lost seats in the House of Representatives. Only thrice has this trend been broken over the last 142 years since 1860: in 1934 during Roosevelt's time; in 1998 during the Clinton presidency; and now George Bush does it.

Bush has made history by increasing the Republican strength in the House from incumbency. And, regaining control of the Senate was a clear prize for him.

Prize for what? Many Democrat senators thought his effective campaign and two-year leadership track-record ensured a good Republican showing at the polls. Bush's detractors, however, ascribe the success to massive campaign spendings.

In the run-up to polls, Republican reference to Iraq was muted. It had to be. The US public being chary of war prospects looming large, the ruling party campaigners kept a low profile on this issue. But the Democrats failed to cash in on it. On the contrary, Bush kept riding the wave of patriotism and support 'unleashed by the September 11 attacks.'

In a scenario where the 'people were left in the mood of wanting to support the president,' the Republicans simply failed to get their messages across. The issues they needed to articulate most - economy, education and healthcare -- were relegated into the background.

As a matter of fact, hardly any distinction could be made between the Democrats and Republicans on the question of their preoccupation with national security concerns. This was basically erased when a bipartisan resolution was adopted to firmly back Bush on his Iraq policy.

Bush's new-found strength in both the houses of Congress will give him a free hand to pursue his conservative agenda, domestic as well as international.

He will try to bolster 'a floundering economy' through a demanding tax regimen.

He seems set to pursue his hard-line policy on Iraq with redoubled energy. That is where the impact of his mid-term electoral showing is likely to be the most pronounced. At the campaign stages, the stance on leadership change in Iraq was softened a bit by asking for iron-clad guarantees on disarmament from Saddam.

Bush may put greater pressure on the UNSC to get a tough resolution against Iraq now.

But Bush knows whatever he does in Iraq will have an impact on the next presidential elections. Those hustings are not too far away.

October that was



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

OCTOBER came and was over in due course. It was not uneventful. There was the continuing rumble of war mongering over Iraq. Grisly deaths in acts of terrorism and counter-terrorism hogged the headlines. Economic slowdown spread unease and fear among the vulnerable. Arguably, there was very little to cheer about and celebrate. The only event in October that could be cause for rejoicing and fond remembrance was forgotten as in the past decade. Like the colonel in Marquez's story, no one writes about October Revolution any more, far less glorify it with pride. The October revolution in Russia has been thrown in the ash heap of history, it would seem. There is handwringing and wincing among its former champions at the very mention of the name. It is brushed aside either as an embarrassment or a nightmare. If nothing succeeds like success, nothing grates and galls like failure.

But October revolution is not about failure in the absolute. The great socialist project conceived in Europe in the nineteenth century was given concrete shape by the historic change that took place on the seventeenth October in Russia. It ushered in the first communist state in the world with the promise to establish dictatorship of the proletariat, abolishing all class divisions based on power and ownership over means of production. October seventeenth was the great political

revolution that socialist and Marxist had waited from the second quarter of the last century. It was to be a prelude, the backdrop, to a social and political revolution marking the triumph of historic class struggle.

It should be admitted that many of the promises were fulfilled following October Revolution. Russia was transformed into a modern industrial economy through the introduction of five-year plans and use of "primitive capital accumulation". The vestiges of feudalism were

rapid strides. Many third world countries got active support in their struggle to throw off colonial rule. Even developed capitalist countries adopted the welfare state model taking lessons from the Russian experience.

Organizations of socialist countries in East Europe were formed for defence and economic cooperation within the communist block. During the cold war, from the end of the Second World War to the collapse of communism in East Europe in 1989,

Orwell's Big Brother and Kafka's Joseph K became representative figures of the system located as opposites. Human rights violation and lack of freedom of speech were brought into sharp focus by the prison camps in Gulags. It has been said in mitigation of these aberrations that internal and external threat faced by Russia from the very inception left it with no other option than the use of repressive state machinery. For this inhumane face, the capitalist west

has always been utopian. It was a distant land, another moral universe. It was radically 'other' vis-a-vis the order of things it aspired to replace. A society without exploitation is in the realm of the ideal. Far from being an inevitability, an exploitation free society where proletariats rule, is an unsolved problem. Referring to some of their predecessors Marx and Engels pointed out that faced with a proletarian class not yet sufficiently developed and faced likewise with

not to speak of luxury items. The long queues of senior citizens, mostly Babushkas, waiting in snow-drift for bread or potato and empty shelves became the enduring images of the communist state, loved by its detractors. In defence it has been pointed out that without depriving consumers, rapid industrialization and the development of Soviet defence capable of matching the capitalist west would not have been possible. For the arms race that absorbed a hefty slice of national investment the west's policy of confrontation should also be blamed, the supporters emphasize.

One does not have to be a die-hard communist to proclaim that compared to the failures, successes and achievements of the October Revolution weigh heavier. But this did not prevent communist Russia from imploding. The secret behind the demise of Soviet Russia still remains an enigma. A convincing and comprehensive analysis of this spectacular collapse without a shot being fired from outside is yet to be made. Appreciation of the results of October revolution does not have to wait for this. It should be remembered for the various spectacular achievements and glorious traditions established even if it is now nothing more than history.

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IN MY VIEW

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abolished through collectivization, albeit at a high cost of human lives and temporary loss of productions. The vacuum created by the collapse of Soviet Russia has now given rise to a uni-polar world where the only superpower now feels no restraint on its policies. Many third world countries benefited from Soviet help and cooperation for a long time which contributed greatly to their development. Without Russian help the success of Bangladesh's liberation war would have been problematic. This is a long list of spectacular achievements and historic successes. It seemed that October revolution delivered more than it had promised. But the down side of the revolution was no less striking, though not immediately perceptible. Ultimately, it was under the weight of the failures that communism in Russia collapsed. Or did it?

Russia maintained balance of power with the capitalist west and thus promoted world peace. The vacuum created by the collapse of Soviet Russia has now given rise to a uni-polar world where the only superpower now feels no restraint on its policies. Many third world countries benefited from Soviet help and cooperation for a long time which contributed greatly to their development. Without Russian help the success of Bangladesh's liberation war would have been problematic. This is a long list of spectacular achievements and historic successes. It seemed that October revolution delivered more than it had promised. But the down side of the revolution was no less striking, though not immediately perceptible. Ultimately, it was under the weight of the failures that communism in Russia collapsed. Or did it?

bears responsibility in no small degree. Whether this attenuates the record of human rights violation significantly is a different matter.

The most outstanding failure of communist Russia was with regard to the establishment of 'the dictatorship of proletariat'. The leaders of the Party and party apparatchiks remained in command from the beginning to the end. State, far from withering away, expanded in scope and power with two distinct classes of rulers and the ruled. The only distinction was that the former belonged to the communist party and not to an elite class and there was no private ownership of means of production. Power was monopolized and exercised mostly for self-aggrandizement and gratification of greed of the individual or the group in power. The 'communist man' did not materialize at the top.

Both during and following October revolution the toll of human lives was high. Stalin's reign of terror came to epitomize the communist

material conditions that were still insufficient for the emancipation of the proletariat, these thinkers could only invent in place of what they lacked. So they invented 'fantastic pictures of future society' i.e. utopia. Marx, in particular, did not believe in ready-made utopias for the working class. They must pass through long process of struggle which would transform circumstances and men, he wrote. His resistance to any blueprint kept Marx from addressing what kind of institutional structures socialist democracy would require. His declaration to the effect that when class distinctions disappear, political conflict would also be over, was seen as a rationalization for the permanent dictatorship of an elite. It was apprehended that members of this elite, the party apparatchiks, would continue to rule indefinitely in the name of workers, which they eventually did.

October revolution's failure is seen starkly in the deprivation of the consumers from essential goods,

Children of perdition



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

TWO seventh graders of Government Laboratory School have been arrested in connection with the murder of their English teacher. They, of course, didn't pull the trigger of the gun, which was fired to kill the poor man. They hired professional killers to do the job, and supplied the revolver, which was used for the murder. If you look at the sunny side of this horrible incident, our children are finally thinking like adults.

So they planned to eliminate what stood in their way and conspired to kill their teacher with a gang of killers. They chose the easy way out, instead of facing the challenge of passing the English test next year, or learning from mistakes when the teacher rebuked to discipline them. They chose to have him murdered.

There is a twist of irony in this tragedy though. The students who couldn't learn their lessons in the classroom went ahead to teach a lesson to their teacher. The Hungarian-born psychiatrist Thomas Szasz writes in *Childhood*, "A child becomes an adult when he realizes

that he has a right not only to be right but also to be wrong." There is no doubt that these boys knew that what they were going to do was wrong, and they exercised that right. For us, the good news is our children are growing up fast.

One could even try to understand if the boys had killed that teacher with their own hands. Children like adults can be overwhelmed with rage at times and commit crimes on the spur of the moment. But these

be ignited by the spark of a rude comment, one push, one simple altercation. We don't know if in future we should be able to ask our children to brush their teeth, go to school or learn good table manners without risking some kind of wrath or retaliation.

The boys have fessed up to their offense under police interrogation. They have told why and how they snuffed out the light of a man's life

that was stored inside each of them? Was it some kind of a phenomenon waiting to happen? What do we call it -- Muslim *kishmet*, Christian *fatum* or Hindu *karma*?

There is a rare congenital abnormality named progeria characterized by premature and rapid aging, the afflicted individual appearing in childhood as an aged person. Are our children afflicted with this ailment, their minds burning out at a speed that defies the growth of their

hardened criminals engaged in the killing trade. May be the teacher didn't realize that his students were in a hurry to grow up, that they were in a rush to exceed their place in life and be somewhere. So they failed the tests because while their bodies were in the classroom, their minds were elsewhere.

Still no matter how one looks at it, it sounds so pathetic. It sounds like our children are competing with us,

CROSS TALK

It is somewhat sad that those boys had to be their own adults, decide their own course of action and live with the consequences of that action. Yet they are so young and naïve, so unaccustomed to the ways of life, so inexperienced of the realities of the world! Perhaps nobody ever told them that the fruits of patience and tolerance were sweeter than vengeance. Perhaps they had felt the rush in them to grow up, and couldn't wait to conquer an enemy without taking his life.

boys planned the murder in cold blood, negotiated contract with a notorious gang, stole money from the house to bankroll the contract, and handed in to killers the revolver, which belonged to the father of one of the two boys. All that time they were thinking of revenge, of teaching a lesson to the man who had dared to expel one of them from the exam hall, give a failing grade to the other and chide them both for mischief.

Which tells us that we are living in a dangerous world, where we don't know who is on the brink of his mind, who is waiting like an explosive to

for doing his job. But they will never be able to tell us where they learned to seek revenge at an age, when they should have played marbles, collected stamps or flown kites. They will never be able to tell us how they were soaked in the deadly juice of retribution at the tender age, when the only disappointment in life should have been the pimples on their face.

We will never know how it all started, the chaos in the Torrid Zone of their cerebral cortex, the catalysis, the sordid rage, the violence that swept their hearts with deadly instincts. How did it happen? Was it the revival of some genetic memory

bodies? Those two boys must be already learning that another shot at the English test would have been much easier than the hell behind the bars they are currently living.

Where did they learn to be so stupid? Where did they learn to throw away their future in order to hate someone? Perhaps that is how it happens when adults act childish and children behave like adults. There is a loss of gravity in either case, when the space of maturity contracts or expands in the temporal conflicts of mind and body.

That must be why the two boys used to hang around with older boys, those who were already

students with teachers and children with parents. There is already a loss of respect for us in their eyes. Gone are the days of obedience and shyness. Gone are the days when the sight of an elderly person sent fear into the hearts of children, when children abstained from mischief because an adult was watching.

But the adults have forgotten that they are also being watched by children, that when they bring home a bundle of cash or stash away a revolver in the house they are being followed by formative minds that are curious to know. How could the two boys have stolen a hefty sum of

money or a revolver without anybody in their houses missing what was lost? It seems nobody was watching them, and then it should not come as surprise if those boys had grown up in their own imagination.

Which they did and they wanted to deal with the world in their own rights. It is somewhat sad that those boys had to be their own adults, decide their own course of action and live with the consequences of that action. Yet they are so young and naïve, so unaccustomed to the ways of life, so inexperienced of the realities of the world! Perhaps nobody ever told them that the fruits of patience and tolerance were sweeter than vengeance. Perhaps they had felt the rush in them to grow up, and couldn't wait to conquer an enemy without taking his life.

Ben Johnson was an English playwright, who wrote that the children of perdition are often made instruments even of the greatest works. These two boys who are responsible for the murder of their teacher, will become adults one day to realize that they hadn't grown up earlier. Meanwhile, the adults need to understand that they are being watched.

May be that is one great thing that will come out of this deplorable matter. After all, it is as important, if not more, for adults to produce sound children as it is for children to produce sound adults.

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Nuclear puzzle complicates Japan-North Korea normalisation talks

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

WHEN the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made his historic trip to North Korea on September 17, many in Japan presumed that the outcome would be as significant as that of the Sino-US thaw more than three decades ago. At the first ever summit meeting between two East Asian neighbours, the leaders of Japan and North Korea pledged to resume the stalled bilateral talks on establishing diplomatic relations and expressed their desire to solve outstanding issues through negotiations. Despite North Korea's confession of involving in kidnapping Japanese nationals in late 1970s and early 1980s, Koizumi returned triumphantly after the groundbreaking daylong trip and soon found his waning popularity showing signs of recovery as opinion polls once again reflected a sharp upward turn of the curve indicating support for the prime minister.

The two countries maintained close liaison since Koizumi's visit

and eventually the date and venue for the resumption of talks were agreed upon. Accordingly, high-level official negotiators from Japan and North Korea met for two days at the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur at the end of last month marking the resumption of the stalled negotiation. The much-expected talks that commenced after a gap of almost two-years, however, ended without any progress on crucial issues.

For Japan the issue considered to be of utmost importance was that of the abducted Japanese nationals and what should be done with five surviving abducted Japanese citizens who are now making a homecoming visit. North Korea, on the other hand, was not willing to discuss an issue that they considered has already been solved when country's leader Kim Jong Il disclosed facts at the summit meeting with the Japanese premier and accused Japan of breaking an agreement by not allowing the five visiting abducted Japanese to return to Pyongyang.

A new stumbling block that

Despite the optimism created after the landmark summit of the leaders of Japan and North Korea, there is simply no shortcut in overcoming difficulties that stand between the two nations. Looming back in the background is also the question of US involvement. Any deal with North Korea on the nuclear issue will have to meet conditions Washington would consider satisfactory.

emerged after North Korea announced last month of its continuation of country's clandestine nuclear weapon programme created further complication that eventually proved to be a difficult hurdle for Japan to overcome. Tokyo is concerned that Japan is as much a target of Pyongyang's nuclear programme as Washington is, and hence demanding that North Korea discuss the issue with Japan at bilateral security talks. The abandonment of North Korea's nuclear ambition has thus become another key issue for Japan in the process of normalisation of relations with North Korea.

At the Kuala Lumpur meeting North Korea outrightly rejected Japan's bid to discuss the nuclear

arms issue as part of the normalisation talks. North's delegation at the meeting made it clear that their government regarded its acknowledged nuclear weapon's programme as a matter to be sorted out with the United States. Pyongyang is thought to have taken the firm line that the US should opt for concluding a non-aggression treaty to solve the issue as Washington has identified North Korea as a component of an 'axis of evil' and threatened to launch pre-emptive strikes.

North Korea's acknowledgement of the continuation of country's nuclear programme has complicated the whole process of negotiation and Japan suddenly found trapped in a matter that country's

negotiators were not at well prepared to face. Ever since the date for the resumption of negotiation was announced, Japan concentrated on the humanitarian matters related to the abduction issue and was preparing for creating pressure on the North Korean side to find out an accepted solution to the problem. The government is under increasing pressure from the group of relatives of abducted citizens and their supporters as well as from recognised hawks within the ruling parties who are demanding that no discussion should proceed with Pyongyang unless the whole truth behind the abduction issue is revealed. As a result, the Japanese delegation attending the Kuala Lumpur talks also had little in a way of scope for

flexible manoeuvring. During talks Japanese negotiators found themselves caught between public outrages back at home and an adamant North Korean delegation accusing Japan of not keeping the commitment of sending back five abducted Japanese nationals after their homecomings.

But one positive development that encouraged many within Japan's official circle is North Korea's change of attitude towards such negotiations. Despite the obvious irritation with the Japanese team, the North Korean delegation stuck to the discussions. In the past they usually walked out, leaving the normalisation process deadlocked. This also encouraged Japan to tighten her own position regarding

demands being made to Pyongyang.

The Japanese government took a tougher approach with North Korea after the stalemate at Kuala Lumpur, saying it won't bother with a second round of talks in November unless North Korea promises to send the families of five abducted Japanese nationals. A task force of country's foreign ministry also confirmed that the government would continue to place priority in negotiations on the abductions and security concerns. This hard-line approach most likely has been triggered by signs of nervousness among North Korean officials who had tried to avoid any breakdown of negotiation. There are every reason for Japan now to believe North Korean leader Kim Jong Il is willing to concede on most of the issues for an early resolution and is instructing his negotiators to quicken the process. Based on such assumption, Tokyo now intends to cash on the situation by skilfully playing the economic assistance card to keep Pyongyang at the negotiating table.

The meeting in Kuala Lumpur

underscored the reality that despite the optimism created after the landmark summit of the leaders of Japan and North Korea, there is simply no shortcut in overcoming difficulties that stand between the two nations. Looming back in the background is also the question of US involvement. Any deal with North Korea on the nuclear issue will have to meet conditions Washington would consider satisfactory.

But as long as lines of communication between concerned governments remain open, there also remains hope that a negotiated settlement of issues would eventually be reached. At the end of the Kuala Lumpur meeting Japan brushed aside North Korea's proposal for the next round of normalisation talks in November. But the Japanese officials however assured their North Korean counterparts that the lines of communication would remain open. So, with that we can hope that not all is over yet of the optimism that set in the mood of discussions only a few weeks ago.