

John Kerry's debate victory could translate into election victory

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HERE are times in every-one's life when a carefully choreographed plan not only goes all awry, it backfires. In the first of the three presidential debates between Republican President George Bush and his Democratic challenger John Kerry in Miami on Thursday, September 30, the Republicans wanted the president to deliver a knockout punch to the challenger and end the contest then and there. The incumbent dictated the terms of the debate. In exchange for three debates instead of two, the Democratic representative Vernon Jordan gladly conceded all of the Republican demands detailed in a 32-page dossier. To shield Bush from having to answer unexpected and tough questions, the agreement stipulated that candidates could not ask each other questions, only the moderator could. The Republicans insisted that foreign policy and the war on terror be the topic of the first debate. War on terror, after all, is the president's forte. The other two debates will focus on domestic issues which usually favour the Democrats.

Americans prefer a tall president. To neutralize Kerry's (6-foot 4inches) height advantage over Bush (5-foot 11 inches) the Republicans demanded and got the podiums for both Bush and Kerry to be of the same height. Republicans did not want America to see Kerry tower over Bush just as Regan (6'4") had towered over Carter (5'11") in 1980 presidential debate (incumbent Carter lost). Knowing that Kerry has a tendency to sweat in debates (just as Richard Nixon had sweated in the first ever televised presidential debate in 1960 and lost the election to Senator John F. Kennedy), the Republicans refused Democrats' request to lower the thermostat below 70 degree Fahrenheit in the debating hall. To expose Kerry's propensity for long and winded answers, and to highlight the president's-to-the-point brevity, the Republicans made the Democrats agree to install on the two podiums lights set to turn red, buzzers set to go off if anyone exceed the time allotted to them (either 2 minutes, 90 seconds or 30 seconds). Surprise! While Kerry remained erect and tall during debate, Bush slumped over the podium and looked even shorter. Confronted with a time clock, Kerry was precise and to the point, while Bush was often incoherent,

bumbling and unintelligible. While Kerry looked presidential, Bush looked angry and petulant and non-presidential. Instead of Kerry, it was Bush who sweated. Instead on Bush knocking out Kerry, it was Kerry who knocked out Bush!

Kerry was the clear winner on substance, style and looking presidential. It appeared as though Bush, who looked weary, fidgety and clueless like a deer caught in a headlight, wanted to be somewhere else. Regardless of how Bush

through smear tactics attempted to destroy his presidential opponent John Kerry. However, just as a pugilist enters the ring without his entourage, Bush found himself alone on the podium without his sleaze team to prop him up. And from the get go Kerry tore into Bush. Surrounded by "yes-men" these days Bush was suffering from the monarch-syndrome. Kerry's blistering attack on Bush with the world watching, rattled Bush. The audacity of a "subject" (Kerry) made

know that Karl Rove will stop at nothing if he feels that his candidate Bush is in trouble.

In the debate Kerry did what he needed to do. As straightforward as he was straight-backed, Kerry was the aggressor and pressed his case for a change of command in the war on terror. Kerry succeeded in separating the war in Iraq from the war on terror, something Bush had successfully fudged. So successful in painting Kerry as a vacillating wimp, Bush nevertheless failed to

shamelessly praise Israel, just as mass murdering criminal Sharon was massacring 28 Palestinians the same day.

Things are clearly looking better for John Kerry. Reversing recent trends, in a *Newsweek* poll taken two days after the debate, Kerry leads Bush 47 per cent to 45 per cent nationally. Incessant negative commercials by the Bush sleaze team had reduced John Kerry to a caricature of his true self. On September 30, he showed America his true self -- a strong leader in command of facts, who articulated an alternate vision for success abroad -- which bears no resemblance to the caricature. On the other hand, the Republicans had built George Bush up as a strong and decisive leader America can depend on during the time of crisis. Instead Bush came across as a bumbling imbecile, who ran out of materials 35 minutes into the 90-minute debate and spent the rest of the time repeating his tired and stale mantra over and over again as if by rote. Because of the Republican demoralisation of Kerry, the bar for Kerry was low; he cleared it easily. Packaged by the Republicans as the "War President," the bar for Bush was high; he ducked under it.

This is reminiscent of the contempt with which President Jimmy Carter and his people had underestimated Ronald Reagan in 1980. Although Regan was a two-term Governor of California (1966-74), the Carter campaign painted him as a third rate Hollywood actor with no knowledge of foreign affairs and domestic policies. In the debates, Reagan looked every bit as presidential as Carter. With American diplomats held hostage in Iran, Americans were looking for an alternative to Carter in 1980. During the debates, they found one in Regan and elected him in a landslide. A recent poll showed that even if Bush wins reelection on November 2, 89 per cent of the Americans want him to follow a different course in Iraq. In the debate Mr. Bush insisted that he will do the same things in Iraq he is doing now. Mr. Kerry said he would do Iraq differently. John Kerry gave the Americans an alternative to George Bush. It is up to the American voters to reward Kerry the way they rewarded Reagan in 1980.

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THE people of Bangladesh are repeatedly confronted with catastrophes such as flood, drought, cyclone etc. Among them flood is very much common. A deluge of extraordinary magnitude ravaged the country this year. The period stretched up to the first fortnight of September. The floodwater played havoc with millions of lives. Around 700 people died and 10 million became homeless. The country sustained staggering losses in terms of damage to agriculture, destruction of homes, death of livestock, and damage to infrastructure.

Causes of flood

The causes of flood are summarized below:

- Three major catchments the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and Meghna converge in the country. In normal years, peak of these three basins do not get together. However, when the peaks synchronise, then flood turns into deluge.

- Increasing communication networks also obstruct the drainage route, aggravate the flood depth. Sedimentation by huge silt (about one third of 2 billion tons annually) in the riverbed reduces the total conveyance capacity of the rivers.

- There is an absence of mega rivers in the northeastern districts, bordering India. The floodwater coming across the border has to travel a long distance to get discharged into the mighty Meghna or upstream Bailai, Surma and Kuchiyara or old Brahmaputra rivers. The old Brahmaputra that branches out of the Jamuna meanders through the greater Mymensingh district. Instead of draining waters of the northeastern catchments during the flood season, it brings more water from the Jamuna delaying the discharge of the receding floodwater from Sunamganj and Sylhet area.

- Almost every year, the water bodies get filled up to the brim. There is hardly any safety margin left between the water line and dry land to prevent flooding. This safety margin needs to be increased by dredging or raising the bed or by constructing dikes. There is also the need to maintain balance between dry land and low flood plains so that floodwater can be accommodated and drained out in time.

- The reason for the recurrent floods are heavy rainfalls in the catchments due to global warming and consequent of the "el nino" and "La Nina" phenomena affecting natural situation of river beds and of flood plains.

- The other mentionable reasons are earth tremors, denudation of trees, river erosion, tidal changes, etc.

- Lack of co-operation from the neighbouring country is now a major concern. The "Farakkah" has caused a tremendous negative impact on our rivers.

Role of government

The govt is yet to reach a decision on a national flood protection programme although it has chartered a national water policy and approved the National Water Management Plan. The former emphasises on measures like embankment and dredging. During the past few decades, the succes-

sive governments executed a large number of flood control projects. (Total embankment-5695 kilometre, flood control/regulating structures-1695, drainage canal-4310 km.) at the advice of local and foreign experts spending crores of taka. But these flood control structures contributed little in reducing flood damage. The flood-affected area in fact has increased from annual 6.4 million hectares in 1954 to 9 million hectares in the 1980s. At present flood protection measure are taken on adhoc basis. In the existing budget, Tk. 1,132 crores has been allocated for water development. Now Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) together with Local Government Engineering Departments (LGED) are engaged in flood protection measures.

No one should do any politics taking recourse to the misery of flood. Flood should not be the tool of politics. Rather it should be a source to be united for the shake of greater interest of the nation. All should come forward with a view to mitigating the problem.

individual, family, community, local authority level. An individual can help by planting trees, a family can join hands with other families to raise the earthen wall around their houses, a community can think and come up with ways of how to protect the plinth of the shared home-steads, the local authority can initiate canal digging etc.

- According to the former chairperson of SPARSO Dr A M Chy we can rely on Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) to forecast flood.

- Last but not least, a dialogue between the two neighbouring countries should continue in this regard. It will help solve the bilateral problems prevailing now.

Conclusion

No one should do any politics taking recourse to the misery of flood. Flood should not be the tool of politics. Rather it should be a source to be united for the shake of greater interest of the nation. All should come forward with a view to mitigating the problem. Otherwise, it will only bring a lot of human misery and sufferings to the people.

Probable solutions

Flood cannot be controlled, rather it should be managed. The nature of the management is suggested below:

- Our tendency is to construct big structures involving large amounts of money. It would be much better to spend money to restore wetlands, replace ground cover on water-course, build check dams on small streams, move buildings off the

flood plains and undertake other non-structural ways of reducing flood.

- Both public and private initiatives should be utilised in controlling flood. The government while constructing embankments should do so by dredging rivers instead of digging the nearby land. Private boats could complement the government ones. In winter, many of the rivers usually dry up or have little water flow. This is the time when riverbeds could be excavated to increase the rivers' holding capacity.

- Water management projects should be introduced. It enables us to produce 7.66 million tons of additional food grain in 1998, which is about 33 per cent of the country's total production.

- Identification of genuinely distressed families, making food stocks available in local godowns with arrangements for quick replenishments from CSDs/silos, providing medicines, ORS, water purifying tablets and guarding against misappropriation of relief materials are the foremost tasks that are to be undertaken with utmost care, firmness and precision.

- NGOs are to be persuaded to mobilise their resources to augment government's relief effort.

- A massive rehabilitation programme is to be mounted to salvage the economy affected by the flood. VGF programme is one of them.

- Since, the government invoked assistance from the international community well ahead, response has been encouraging. Top priority should be assigned to agriculture, fisheries and livestock and rebuilding of basic infrastructure.

- Flood shelters like the cyclone shelter built in the coastal areas, should be constructed especially in the most flood prone places across the country. Such shelter should have adequate sanitary facilities in order to check the outbreak of diarrhoea and cholera.

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Chechen Muslims and repercussions of Beslan massacre

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THE demand for the rights of the Chechens is well understood by the world and international human rights organisations. They are aware of how Josef Stalin drove the Chechens into exile killing one-third of them on the trek to Kazakhstan, accusing them of collaborating with the Germans during World War-II. Again brutal war is being carried out by Kremlin for over ten years in Chechnya, killing innocent men, woman and children. This has sparked the Chechnyan separatist movement, increased the desperation of the Chechen Muslims and driven young people towards Islamist radicalism and suicide bombing.

The siege of a primary school

early last month, by the terrorists reportedly acting in the name of Islam, not only put the Chechnyans' politics and ideology in shambles, but posed a problem to entire 1.2 billion Muslim population of the world. This barbaric act is undoubtedly the most horrific experience for any human being. Therefore the Muslims of the world condemned this idiosyncratic crime and shared the grief of those who lost their near and dear ones in the Beslan massacre.

As a consequence this dastardly action will strengthen the hands of Putin and misguide the Russian population against the Muslims. Likewise, a political gift for Bush, who will seize on these tragic events to justify Washington's militarist policies in the name of the "war on terrorism," and add mileage to his election campaign. The other

assailants identified as six Chechens and the rest Ingus, and two women -- so-called, "Black Widows" of slain Chechen fighters -- stormed the school during the opening after the summer break. They took some 1500 people hostage into the gymnasium of the school. Maximum of them were children. The 53-hour siege ended in a bloodbath with a death toll of 327, half of them children.

It is not clear how Kremlin will respond to the recent series of terror attacks. Putin known for his hard line on Chechens may have to change his scheme to tackle the issue. Playing drake and duck game is not the solution.

advantage is for the coalition forces killing innocent civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq on plea of terrorism.

In brief, this barbaric action took place in Beslan, a town of 30,000 inhabitants in North Ossetia, a republic near the war torn region of Chechnya. Majority of the population of North Ossetia are orthodox Christians and others are a small community of Ingush Muslims. Some twenty criminal

between the Black and the Caspian Seas, in the Caucasus area. Populations of this region were finally consolidated into the state much later, in the 19th century. Though the population merged, but skirmish continued all the way up to 1991. This resistance quickly intensified into full-scale war as the Republic of Chechnya sought to break away from the Russian state.

Still, the majority of Muslims in that region owe their allegiance to the Russian state, and have repelled attempts by Chechen separatists and their backers.

Currently, Russian forces are fighting a bloody war in Chechnya, with no end in sight to the conflict. The cycle of violence is claimed to have allegedly attracted powerful Islamic fundamentalist forces, such as al-Qaeda, to the region. But, Kremlin is yet to prove such involvement. Some think-thank say, such claim is nothing but to give international colour to terrorism in Russia.

Though, Russia supported the illegal invasion of Iraq by the US and Britain, they and some countries of EU are said to be providing asylum to many Chechen and Ingus fugitives. Some of the top Chechen brass who have been given asylum are Ahmed Zalkaev in the UK and Ilyas Ahmadov in the US. The irony is that neither US nor UK are pressuring Russia to improve human rights condition.

To sooth the Chechen Muslims and as a showcase to the world Kremlin seeks to constantly reassure the Muslim population of the freedom to practice their religion and of their full inclusion into all facets of life in the Russian Federation.

In August 2003 Russia went a step further in reassuring its Muslim population by becoming a member in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Joining OIC helped Russia to achieve a better relationship with Islamic states than it had during the Cold War. Beside, its membership of the OIC serves its own geopolitical intention of monitoring the growing American presence in the Muslim states following the terrorist attacks of September 11.

But the war in Chechnya has gone to great lengths to antagonise the general population -- and, in some cases, the government itself -- against Russian Muslims. Many of them also complain of harassment and intimidation by police and federal forces in Chechnya.

The present upheavals have put Russia to a dreaded repercussion, as it now faces the possible

