

We wish Bush all the best

He can do a world of good with his mandate

BUSH has beaten Kerry fair and square in his re-election bid. He has secured majority of both popular and electoral college votes by clearly wider margins than tallied by him in the 2000 presidential race. The Republican party winner has also emerged in greater strength at the Senate and the House of Representatives with implications of a smoother sail for him through the legislature. Budgetary proposals apart, in seeking congressional approval for appointments, especially including confirmation of the Supreme Court judges he would need to name in the near future, he stands on a stronger footing. It's a complete victory for George W Bush.

But whether there would be any new direction in the US policies could only be clear if and when changes are made in the top posts of the US administration.

All of Bush's records in the first term read like an open book. Against that familiar backdrop, the world is keen to see how he uses his rejuvenated authority and regained electoral mandate. The expectation, however, is that he will avoid the past pitfalls and deliver a quality of leadership beyond reproach. Kerry with his four years of change plank has won a measure of voter support in absolute numbers that is reflective of a divisive US electorate -- almost in the middle. This is not apparently lost on Bush who says, "I will be the president for all Americans".

The United States as the sole superpower has a great responsibility, one that ought to go far beyond the confines of the 'war on terror'. In his second term, Bush cannot afford to remain unfocused on the issues of global poverty, trade negotiations and environment with a focus around mandatory cutting of green house emissions by the developed world, especially the US.

It is not enough for Bush to be sensitive to the internal divisiveness in the US; he is expected now to be inclusive in his attitude to the whole world abandoning his exclusionary slogan to the effect that those who are not with the US can go their way. Bush would do well to remember that just as the US public was divided on the rationale for war on Iraq so were the majority of the US' traditional allies against it, let alone the rest of the world populace demurring at the pre-emptive strike. The anti-America sentiments aroused by some of Bush's actions were something of a global wave, not US-bashing, so these better be assuaged for the good of America.

The free hand given to Sharon must be replaced by a balanced US approach to the Middle East which remains the major source of terrorism and violence, not just in the region but in a global sense, too.

We congratulate George W Bush and wish him all the best. His reelection is a big triumph, one that must inspire him to work for a permanent place in history.

Homage to slain leaders

The nation remains indebted to them

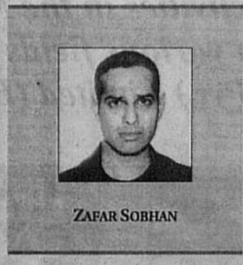
OUR memories of the four national leaders -- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, HM Qamruzzaman and Captain Mansur Ali -- who were slain in their prison cells some three decades ago were rekindled on the Jail Killing Day two days back. They steered us through the uncertainty of those excruciating nine months, when the nation was engaged in a crucial fight against the brutal colonial rule in 1971.

Jail killing is one of the darkest episodes in our history. It not only eliminated the patriotic leaders but also greatly undermined the spirit of our liberation war. The crime committed by some misled members of the army completely changed the complexion of politics in this country. All the more so because it actually followed the murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family on August 15, 1975. The blueprint of the killers was quite obvious -- they wanted to eliminate the leaders who had played a pivotal role in the war of liberation in a bid to foster ethos counter to those of our freedom struggle. Nowhere in the civilised world have national leaders been killed in such a brutal manner and that, too, in a jail where the prisoners are supposed to be protected by the government.

Enough time has elapsed since we had the misfortune of losing the four leaders. The conscientious always demanded that the killers be punished. However, politics and intrigues stood in the way of bringing the killers to justice for 21 years. The verdict on the jail killing case was finally delivered after long 29 years. But it failed to bring solace to the members of the families of the leaders as they believe that justice has not been meted out the way it ought to have been. What is difficult to accept is that nobody has been convicted for masterminding the crime, although there must have been those who had called the shots from behind.

We remember the national leaders whose relentless efforts helped us emerge as an independent nation, nine months after the liberation war began.

What's the matter with America?



ZAFAR SOBHAN

THERE is a book out right now called *What's the Matter with Kansas?* by Thomas Frank in which the author explores the issue of why it is that so many middle and low-income Americans consistently vote Republican even though to do so is manifestly against their own economic interests.

Frank's explanation is interesting. He suggests that there is such little difference between Democrats and Republicans on economic issues that much of the electorate makes its decisions based largely on social and cultural issues.

The Republicans have proved adept at stoking up cultural anger in middle America against East coast elites, and keep winning elections by basing their appeal on a raft of social issues such as guns and abortion. These social issues resonate with the party faithful and get them to the polls in record numbers, as happened in 2004.

The point is to keep the fires of resentment burning against a liberal East coast elite trying to impose its values on the heartland, so that the heartland cultural conservatives are motivated to turn out in droves on election day to vote against Democrats -- the party which is seen as the embodiment of such elitism.

Frank further suggests that the Democrats have no one but themselves to blame for this, and that the solution for them is to put forward more populist economic policies that would counteract the appeals

to cultural and social issues made by the Republicans.

However, this is where his analysis breaks down, and there is no real support for his contention that if Democrats shifted to the left on economic issues that this would incline culturally conservative voters to give them another look.

In addition, let me suggest that, contrary to Frank's confident assertion, there do exist significant differences between the two parties on economic matters.

The one thing that Frank does

but convincing enough.

Bush received nearly sixty million votes -- the most in US history -- and the Republicans picked up seats in the House and Senate. In 2000, Bush lost the popular vote by half a million, but this year his winning margin was over three and a half million, and he won 51 per cent of the popular vote.

Nor can anyone argue that the US electorate didn't know what it was getting. In 2000, Bush was something of an unknown quantity, but in 2004, everyone knows what kind

better job in the war on terror than Kerry.

In fact the exit polls make for alarming reading. This election was not a fluke. President Bush won because quite clearly more Americans agree with his policies and vision than with those of Senator Kerry.

The simple fact is that it didn't bother the electorate that Bush had run a mendacious and underhanded campaign against Kerry. In fact, more people thought that the Kerry campaign had been unfair

marriage. Initiatives to ban gay marriage passed in all eleven of the states in which they were on the ballot, and the issue brought conservative voters to the polls in record numbers. Millions of evangelicals who stayed home in 2000 came out to vote in 2004 based on their opposition to gay marriage and this helps to explain Bush's margin of victory.

In retrospect, the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision legalising gay marriage was one of the turning points in the election. It was this

ribbed leader in the war on terror, if more Americans believe that the most important thing is to deny civil rights to homosexuals, if more Americans believe that the president served more honourably than Kerry in Vietnam -- then the Democrats can't win.

The problem is not with the Democratic party. The problem is with the American people.

After all, this is a people more than 40 percent of whom still think that there was a link between Saddam Hussein and 9/11 and almost 50 percent of whom think that things are going well for the US in Iraq.

There isn't much you can do about an electorate so deeply mired in delusion and denial.

I have always told my American friends that most people around the world do not dislike America -- only the Republican party and its policies.

Most people around the world are quite capable of distinguishing between the people of a country and their leadership. But in a democracy at some point the people have to take responsibility for the man who is elected by them.

George Bush is clearly the American people's choice for president. Sixty million votes. The most in US history. More than Ronald Reagan ever received. 51 per cent of the popular vote. More than Bill Clinton ever received.

Perhaps the electorate could have been forgiven for 2000. No one knew for sure how bad Bush would be. Plus there is a good argument to be made that he didn't really win in the first place and certainly he lost the popular vote.

But not this time. This time -- much as it pains me to admit -- Bush seems to have won fair and square.

To my American friends -- you are always asking why people don't like America. Perhaps this is why.

Zafar Sobhan is an Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

STRAIGHT TALK

If more Americans trust the economy to Bush than to Kerry despite the evidence of the past four years, if more Americans believe that the war in Iraq has made them safer, if more Americans believe that Bush is a steadfast and rock-ribbed leader in the war on terror, if more Americans believe that the most important thing is to deny civil rights to homosexuals, if more Americans believe that the president served more honourably than Kerry in Vietnam -- then the Democrats can't win.

not or perhaps cannot mention when he writes about the dominance of the Republican party in the heartland states is that the Republican strategy for victory is predicated on the essential baseness of the electorate in these states.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with voting on cultural and social issues rather than economic ones -- but the question Frank should be asking is what kind of social issues motivate these voters and what does this tell us about them.

And now that President Bush has won re-election by a comfortable margin, the question that I think needs to be asked is not what is wrong with Kansas, but what is wrong with the US as a whole.

There is no way to spin the election outcome positively for the Democrats. The election has been an endorsement of President Bush. Not a resounding mandate perhaps,

of a man he is and where he stands on the issues.

So let's look at how and why he won and what a Bush victory says about the American people.

There were a number of key issues in the 2004 elections -- the economy, the president's leadership in the war on terror including the war in Iraq, and social issues such as gay marriage.

In the end, the economy proved to be a wash. Even some states such as Ohio which lost hundreds of thousands of jobs on Bush's watch ended up going for him, and exit polls show that slightly more voters trusted Bush with the economy than Kerry.

In the end it all came down to Bush's leadership in the war on terror including the war in Iraq and the social issues.

Exit polls suggest that an overwhelming majority of voters believed that Bush would do a

than the other way around.

It didn't matter to the electorate that Bush had misled the country into war and has since then sensationally mishandled the continuing occupation. It didn't matter to the electorate that the invasion of Iraq has made the US far less safe from terror and that Bush has consistently underfunded and politicised homeland security as well.

In fact, a majority of Americans agreed with President Bush that the war on Iraq is an essential part in the war on terror and approved of the decision to go to war.

Bush won because on most of the important issues most of the American people agreed with him and not Kerry.

Nor should one discount the impact of cultural and social issues. This year the big issue was gay

that brought the issue of gay marriage to the forefront of the public mind and mobilised conservative voters to turn out to vote in the numbers they did.

Even though he too opposes gay marriage -- the fact that Senator Kerry is from Massachusetts couldn't have helped him with these voters, who overwhelmingly voted for President Bush.

The exit poll results on questions such as Bush's leadership and Iraq and "moral values" show that the time has come for the Democratic party to stop wringing its hands in despair and wondering what it can do to appeal better to voters in middle America.

If more Americans trust the economy to Bush than to Kerry despite the evidence of the past four years, if more Americans believe that the war in Iraq has made them safer, if more Americans believe that Bush is a steadfast and rock-

A bleeding heart



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE day after he woke up in the middle of the night, feeling warm and sticky on the chin and the chest, the doctor said it was his sinus, which was clogged up and infected. But he insisted that the blood did not come from the head. Instead it was his bleeding heart, which poured through the nose, because he was thinking of her before he went to bed. He was living alone after twenty years, separated from his wife and children, like a man marooned on an island because his cruise ship never returned to take him back.

He bounced in the couch, clapped in the air and spoke with a cackle in the voice, giving a sense of the struggle to hide the pain, which gathered in his face. Twenty years, he said, was a common thing between sugar palm tree and his marriage. Then he looked with a smack in his face and set out to explain what he just said. A sugar palm tree could be male or female, but it takes twenty years to know its sex.

It took him twenty years to know

his marriage. He lived with a woman under the same house, in the same bed, eating at the same table, sharing jokes, visiting friends, making love, raising children, their togetherness of all those years divided into days, multiplied by hours, split into moments. How their bodies were attached but minds were detached!

The bleeding was compounded by headache and fever, which lasted for three days. For the first time in his life, he realised that loneliness was worse than death, which sentenced a man to the horror of his

crash the doors and windows in a storm. He wished he had not lived to see this day, to lose his wife, to lose his children, to come back where he started, his life curled up inside the coils of time like a rolled up manuscript going back to shelf.

To live more is to die more, each day the shadow of death encroaching upon the trail of life, every breath wasting the body like a burning candle, the end waxing as fast as the beginning waned. He looked at his hands, gray hairs scattered like shreds of white wool, telltale signs

flower. The blood could not have come from his head. Three days after it happened to him, he was still convinced that it was his wounded heart, which had exploded under the burden of grief and splattered out the blood in his sleep.

His daughter had turned eighteen and the son had just learned to walk, each reaching a time of life when both needed their father. They came from him, his own children, flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood, yet he was removed from them like the seed, which had van-

ished once the tree was grown. For many years he desired for a son, his heart heavy with sadness that he would die without leaving a male descendant to carry his bloodline.

It was not always that he missed his wife, although he thought of her day and night. These days she came across as a familiar landscape, which looked bleak and dreary, one that evoked a sense of yearning, not for what it became but for what it was. He wished she had not been so arrogant, so self-centered, misguided by his in-laws to ruin his life. He sprang up on his feet and went for a brisk walk around the couch, as

have been true for his wife as well. They talked to each other, touched each other, looked at each other for countless moments, standing like two trees in the woods, each on its own ground, each in his pain and sorrow, alone in union, two streams in one flow. Human body is lot like a carnival when it is young, he argued while returning to the couch. It juggles, it swings, walks on the tightrope, jumps, skips, takes the rides -- acrobats, clowns and circus animals featuring in its veins and muscles.

His body was quiet and exhausted, much like the morning after a long carnival night. He was pushing sixty as the termites of age were eating into the fibers of his body and making it hollow. He needed his wife and he needed his children, he needed to be surrounded by those he loved before the darkness of death descended on him.

He wished someone had talked to his wife and told her that life was short. There was time for everything, time to sow and time to reap. He wanted to collect what was scattered and get back what was lost. He took a deep breath and held his nose, lest his heart was going to bleed again.

It was a tragedy to born and die. It was even worse to be married and separated. But the worst was yet to come when one is loved and hated. He loved for twenty years and now he was hated. It felt like separation every moment and it felt like death every day. He wished he knew, if his wife also felt the same way.

He was always lonely in his worries and anxieties, and it must

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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tormented soul, reminding him every living moment that he was not needed. For twenty years he broke his back for his wife and children, only to feel desolate in the sunset of life like a clamorous house abandoned of all a sudden.

It was hell to become lonely and single after twenty years, to bear the burden of memories, weighing on him from the moment he opened his eyes in the morning till he closed them at night. There was a sense of grief that never left him since his wife was gone, the grief that swirled inside his chest and pushed its walls like strong wind threatening to

shudder at the prospect of dying alone, breathing his last in his bed or collapsing in the bathroom while taking a shower, the fabled story of living abruptly ended by a pain in the chest or a dizzy spell.

He loved his wife and he loved his children, and now they were gone. People come together and they separate all the time in the great churning of life that forever mixes joy with sorrow, gain with loss. He had plans, he had dreams; he wished to stay with his children and their children, enmeshed in the concourse of life like a petal in the

for a brisk walk around the couch, as

He was convinced by all of that in the heady days of his youth, when the demons of lust worked up the body, their ferocity igniting flames of passion in the layers of flesh. In the last three days, when his body burned with fever and his head spun in the emptiness of a plundered soul, he thought of what his father had repeatedly said to him. Marriage worked like an illusion, he said, when two lonely hearts came together to believe that they were not alone any more.

He was always lonely in his worries and anxieties, and it must

A few drops of tears for Shosei Koda

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

NOBODY knows what prompted him to go to that troubled land. Nobody will probably know what was he thinking about when the moment struck and his head fell off his body. But the scene pictured in the human mind will haunt many for many more days to come.

Shosei Koda was only twenty-four when he heard the call of his heart and crossed the risky road passing through the desert of Jordan and Iraq. But we know twenty-four is not an age to calculate carefully the risks as well as profits and gains of our treacherous life. He also didn't calculate that. He simply wanted to see with his own eyes what his leadership and the media back at home told him about the situation of a country so different and so far from where he had grown up. And as he listened to the call of his heart, he obviously didn't bother about all the warnings and precautions that many at home routinely pronounce to stop people like him to move over to places they consider unsettled and risky.

We now know he was in Baghdad

without any preconceived purpose or motive. He was not a member of any of those radical groups demanding the withdrawal of their country's troops from Iraq, which they are think in that troubled land not to help the Iraqis at the time when they are desperately in need of help, but to please the masters who virtually rule over their land supposed to be free to take decisions of its own.

He also didn't belong to any of those humanitarian organisations whose members routinely risk their life for the greater cause of helping those who are direly in need of such help. He was simply an angry young man of twenty-four, who wanted to see with his own eyes the situation of the land before deciding which side he was to take. Yet he had been branded a terrorist by none other than the person supposed to look after the well-being of country's citizens, more of those who find themselves trapped in a helplessness situation.

We now know for sure, Shosei Koda was trying to find an accommodation in Baghdad and as he failed to secure one, he was on his way back to Amman from where he started his ill-fated journey early last

CLOSUP JAPAN

I'm not sure if Mr. Koizumi is having sound sleep at night. Maybe he is, as he might reply without any hesitation: "You see Shosei, our constitution doesn't allow us to keep soldiers. So as the question doesn't arise of sending soldiers to Iraq, you can tell your captors that we have sent our people to Iraq only for the noble purpose of self-defense. If they are still not satisfied, just ask them to read the Japanese constitution carefully."

week. As Baghdad became a risky place with the arrival of US troops in Iraq, owners of city's numerous hotels, except the very expensive ones, are now closing their doors to foreigners for the fear of being the easy target of city's countless insurgent groups, who are also a wonderful by-product of US occupation and allied presence in the country. As Shosei couldn't afford five-star luxuries with his hard earned income as a restaurant helping hand in various countries, he had no other option but to return to Amman and think about his further plan afterwards. But when ill luck strikes, things do not happen as we wish.

It is now said that as he was waiting for a bus that would take him back to Amman, two young Iraqis approached him and he followed them to a black car. That was the last time he was seen in public. His next public appearance was in a video footage broadcast by al-Jazeera television where he asked a plain but also a very difficult question to the prime minister of his country and expressed the desire that he wanted to return home. He addressed the Japanese prime minister straightforwardly as Mr. Koizumi and told him that his captors wanted to know why Japanese soldiers were in Iraq. He also didn't forget to let the prime minister know

that what he wanted was to return home. It is quite significant that he didn't approach the prime minister to save his life. Maybe the sense of dignity didn't allow him to place himself that low in front of someone he might have rightfully thought lacking the essential quality of understanding the feeling of others who are caught in a helplessness situation.

We all now know what Mr. Koizumi reply was to Shosei's simple but difficult question. He outrightly rejected any possibility of negotiation with the terrorists, and by saying so, branded Shosei too nothing more than a terrorist who was disturbing his pleasant nightly

sleep. Moreover, the way he expressed his disgust was itself disgusting to look at, as if hate was spilling all over his face. No doubt the kidnappers of Shosei also watched the reaction of the Japanese prime minister and it is most likely at that very moment Shosei's fate was eventually sealed. From then on it was only matter of hours for the beheaded body to be recovered and the police in Baghdad concluded the task that began its formal start with Koizumi's remark.

I remember Shosei's mother addressing a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan last Friday. It was just after the

expiration of the deadline set by his captors for the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Iraq and nothing was heard of his fate. The tearful mother only hoped that people would understand that he went to Iraq not to disturb peace but to see for himself the sufferings of the people of the country. And only hours after she spoke at the Press Club, the news came that more than 100,000 Iraqis have been killed in the country since the Americans and their allies, including Japan, have "liberated" the country. She obviously didn't think that her son would soon be included in the long list of those who gave their life for a cause that is increasingly becoming misleading.

Shosei Koda is no longer among us to repeat his simple question to the Japanese prime minister. But for many who see the presence of Japanese soldiers in Iraq as a mere display of US subjugation of Japan, the same question is now blowing in the wind as Shosei's head hang at a distance with drops of blood slipping from the place where it had been chopped. The blood slipping head is endlessly repeating the same question as it keeps on saying, "Mr.

Koizumi, they wanted to know why Japanese soldiers are in Iraq... But I want to return home."

I'm not sure if Mr. Koizumi is having sound sleep at night. Maybe he is, as he might reply without any hesitation: "You see Shosei, our constitution doesn't allow us to keep soldiers. So as the question doesn't arise of sending soldiers to Iraq, you can tell your captors that we have sent our people to Iraq only for the noble purpose of self-defense. If they are still not satisfied, just ask them to read the Japanese constitution carefully."

As the tragedy takes a new turn, what we can do is only to shed silent tears for a twenty-four year old young man who kept his head high and didn't beg for his rescue, as he wanted to let the prime minister know that his only desire was to return home. His headless body will soon be back to his native land. But as the chopped head has disappeared somewhere in the treacherous sand of Iraq, it will keep on returning in the minds of those who were so indifferent about his fate just to repeat the same question that Shosei asked the prime minister when he was last time seen alive.