

## Government recruitment reforms

*A review of the quota system is necessary*

THE Public Service Commission (PSC) being the largest recruiting agency for the largest employer i.e. the state there is need to regularly incorporate reforms to keep it attuned to the requirement of the time. It is heartening to note that there are recommended changes in the employment procedures of the Commission awaiting government approval.

However, it appears from the recent report on the matter in The Daily Star that the PSC has not made any recommendation on the present quota system. We feel that the government must reconsider the 55 percent quota system that is currently in vogue. While there is considerable merit in allotting quota for various disadvantaged groups in society, the downside of it is that it can breed mediocrity at the cost of quality alongside opening the scope for misuse of the system, as we have seen happen in the past.

Needless to say, we would like to see the best of the nation's merit join the public service. And the only criterion in that case must be merit and merit alone. Quality must not be sacrificed for any another consideration. Unfortunately, recruitment on quota system remains a discriminatory arrangement against meritorious candidates.

The system of having only 45 percent of the candidates selected on merit while 55 percent being set aside for the four categories, namely, freedom fighters, women, disadvantaged districts and indigenous people, deserves review of the government.

While there are good reasons for keeping ten percent reserved seats for women and five percent for the indigenous people, and we understand the sentiments behind allowing quota for the freedom fighters there is yet scope for reconsidering the 33 percent quota for the freedom fighters and ten percent for disadvantaged districts. Our reason for saying so is that, the system has been misused for corruption, political patronization and as a means to politicise the state machinery by filling these positions by those of the same political ilk of the party that runs the government of the day, unfortunately, at the cost of merit and quality.

The need is for a knowledge-based society, particularly when the world is becoming a global village, increasingly dependent on knowledge and intelligence that would be capable of exploiting information technology for national development. Such a situation, we fear, cannot emerge if the present system is continued.

We also cannot overlook the fact that these recruits will be directly involved in governance which essentially means managing scant resources of the state. Underserving people selected on partisan considerations, as happened in the last 15 years of political government, can hardly be capable of ensuring that.

## Taking care of drug addicts

*Standardise rehab clinics*

ALTHOUGH drug addiction has been identified as an area of grave concern, with the number of addicts increasing alarmingly day by day, the treatment and rehabilitation centres are in bad shape, to say the least. The response in terms of treatment of this highly debilitating social malady is nowhere near what it should be, not even in Dhaka city.

Examples should make the point clear. The 115 clinics in the city that are known as drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation centres are being run illegally without any licence issued by the Department of Narcotics Control. This obviously is a lapse of a very serious kind, which puts a question mark on the validity of the whole business.

Most of the clinics don't even have qualified doctors or nurses. It is difficult to comprehend how untrained doctors and nurses could treat addicts who don't quite fall in any common category of patients. Yet, this is happening year after year without the matter being noticed or any objection being raised by the cheated patients or their families or the ministry concerned acting of its own.

Needless to say, the treatment seekers cannot expect much from the clinics that did not even bother to go by the rules. Some of them may be doing a good job but because they are not subjecting themselves to any discipline in a specialised field tends to make them unethical and non-professional ventures. They need to be standardised.

The narcotic department or, for that matter, the government is also to blame for not enforcing rules to bring them under a uniform system of oversight and make them deliver the goods they are charging for.

It is really disquieting to think how many lives have already been ruined in the name of rehabilitation due to the quackery practised in most of those clinics. The job at hand is to screen the existing rehab centres against certain set criteria and retain those with potential to improve and modernise themselves while jettisoning others that fail the tests.

# Reforming omnipotent police and omniscient politicians



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

## STRAIGHT LINE

The police organisation of tomorrow will have to evolve a shared vision and understanding of a common mission, which will increasingly be focused on meeting the community's expectations. "Putting the customer first" would certainly improve the confidence of the public, and an overt commitment to enhance the standards of both public safety and police accountability will require the police leadership to lead and manage, not simply "run," the force to get results consistent with the mission.

HISTORICALLY speaking, we have acquired omnipotent police, who largely serve only those in power. Laws have been promulgated which give police wide powers to deny human rights, in some cases even the most basic civil liberties to the citizens. Our police, in such an unwholesome environment, have been corrupted, and are permitted to indulge in arbitrary conduct including torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.

Police authority has been abused in our democracy. Consequently, it has become more the master and less the servant. In the process, it has snuffed out more freedom than it has protected. The problem lies in control.

Abuse of authority has flourished on account of official negligence and acquiescence. Such a state of affairs places considerable moral burdens on upright police officials and well meaning politicians, whose actions to check drifts of this kind are of paramount importance to the preservation of human rights.

We, unfortunately, have relied on punitive policing, which, in reality, has meant control through suspended terror. It works on the assumption that if

the penalties, or police severities, are sufficiently horrible, people will be deterred from committing crimes.

Not many people realise that police reform needs more than just a facelift; it requires in-depth examination of the police organisation, its mandate, and its functional dynamics. It also underpins the need to put in place effective structures, both to oversee the police performance and to ensure realisation of the organisational mission.

The reform process has to touch all ranks and has to be all-inclusive, calling for commitment and a sense of purpose from the political executive, since what is involved is basically a re-determination of the whole governance paradigm.

Every organisation, whether public or private, can only perform well if founded on valid organisational principles. In the case of police force of Bangladesh, these principles were ruthlessly violated over the years, resulting in corrupt, inefficient and a highly politicised police force. Increasingly, the police were made to act as agents of the political executive rather than instruments of a democratic state.

The selective application of

the law against opponents, whether political or personal, at the behest of persons of influence became the norm rather than the exception. People perceived the police as agents of the party in power, not as members of an organisation publicly maintained to enforce rule of law.

As the ground conditions that made the 1861 Police Act expedient have long ceased to exist, the police force of Bangladesh needs to be urgently transformed from its colonial mould and organised on the basis of principles that govern standard, modern, contemporary police forces meant to police free societies, not natives.

The key questions relevant to the subject under discussion are: What kind of organisation will the police of Bangladesh need to meet the 21st century law and order challenges? Which model can be most efficient in bringing about a fruitful change in the existing intolerably high level of police-public estrangement? How can the police force be effectively brought under democratic control while ensuring its political neutrality?

As a first step, the responsibility of maintenance of law and order will need to rest unambiguously with the police. The police hierarchy will have to be made responsible, not merely

for the organisation and the internal administration of the force, but also for all matters connected with maintenance of law and order. In short, policing operations will no longer have to be subjected to general control and direction from outside the police department.

Steps will also be required for rendering the police professionally competent, operationally neutral, functionally cohesive and organisationally responsible for all their actions, which, in turn will lead to efficient police operations, better decision-making, improved discipline, and revamping of police accountability mechanisms.

The role, duties and responsibilities of police will have to be orientated in a manner in which service function gets precedence, and the prevention and detection of crime is seen to have a social purpose. The reform strategy should seek to solicit voluntary support and co-operation of the people of Bangladesh.

Unless the police are enabled to function fairly and independently, there can be neither justice nor viable order. Since the predominant purpose of the police is to enforce the laws of the land, without fear or favour, it is crucial to render it politically neutral. Such neutrality has been achieved in

other countries by placing the police under apolitical control, thus creating a cushion between political expediency and law enforcement. In the absence of such a cushion, people of influence simply won't let the police do their mandated duty.

Simultaneously, as no police force can hope to perform its functions efficiently and effectively without enjoying a high degree of public support for the integrity of its operations, it is crucial to bring it under a system of accountability that enjoys public confidence. Once the police are enjoined upon to perform a just and constructive role in the community, their work ethics would start undergoing a radical change.

Being subject to law, they would strive to uphold and promote the cause of public interest, and a jealous safeguarding of democratic norms based on rule of law and due process would be their motto.

Police accountability is a subject of heightened contemporary significance. The increasingly sophisticated range of coercive, scientific and technical apparatus at the command of the police requires stricter accountability controls.

Not only is the existing accountability mechanism ineffective, it also hardly enjoys any public confidence. Its replacement with statutory institutions, like the Independent Police Complaints Authority in Britain or the Public Safety Commission System in Japan, is, thus, an urgent necessity. (The Independent Police Complaints Authority in Britain consists of members of civil society and is mandated to inquire into serious complaints against the police, and one of the most important

functions of the Public Safety Commission System in Japan is to ensure that police operations are uninfluenced by the party in power. Being in charge of the administration of the police force in their respective jurisdictions, the apolitical Public Safety Commissions at national and prefecture-level in Japan are meant to ensure that police are insulated from the day to day debilitating influence of political control).

The reform process also requires that the political and police leaderships in Bangladesh realise that the police have to respond to the expectations of their customers if they are to be effective. Historically, there has been reluctance on the part of the senior police hierarchy to recognise the necessity of seeing the police force as an organisation that is fundamentally no different from any other enterprise or business. There has been a tendency to hide behind the complexity of policing as a means of excusing poor management and leadership.

The police organisation of tomorrow will have to evolve a shared vision and understanding of a common mission, which will increasingly be focused on meeting the community's expectations. "Putting the customer first" would certainly improve the confidence of the public, and an overt commitment to enhance the standards of both public safety and police accountability will require the police leadership to lead and manage, not simply "run," the force to get results consistent with the mission.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist for The Daily Star.

# Using technology to estimate the damage to rice

The matter is as simple as that. It is heartening that the present government has taken this problem seriously, and Sparro technology can be used to estimate the exact loss of crops so that the necessary amount could be procured in the least possible time. As a matter of fact, the updating of Sparro equipment was done with the assistance of the Ministry of Food, and there is a memorandum of understanding between Sparro and the Ministry of Food for making crop estimation and supplying the same to the latter.

A.M. CHOUDHURY

BANGLADESH Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (Sparro) estimated the amount of production of amon and boro rice using satellite technology during the nineties, and the government, to keep the price of rice stable, used this information.

It is often said that Bangladesh is a poor nation and does not have access to technology. Well, this is not true. In this age of information proliferation, you can have access to information at affordable cost. Does anybody in the government or society ask what is Sparro doing?

It is known that Bangladesh does not have a satellite of its own, but satellites are devices that pass over all the countries, irrespective of political boundaries, and gather information as programed. The satellite owning

countries have a liberal attitude in that they permit any country to gather regional data by establishing a suitable ground station, excepting, of course, very high-resolution data pertaining to national security.

The unclassified satellites include weather and resource satellites. Sparro established a very high-resolution ground station under a US-AID assisted project with technical support from Nasa during the nineteen eighties. The name of the project was Agro-Climatic Environmental Monitoring Project (ACEMP), of which this author was the project director.

It may be mentioned that the author was awarded Nasa Group Achievement Award for successful completion of the project. Under the project, Sparro used to monitor the weather, including the deadly tropical cyclones, and also

make very reliable estimates of amon and boro crops. The US Noaa satellite was used for this purpose. Bangladesh has the advantage that its area is small and mostly flat, and the whole country comes in one frame of the image and can be analysed in a matter of hours. Whereas, in the case of India or US, hundreds of frames need to be analysed, and it may take months to get the result.

All objects like water, vegetation, soil etc. radiate electromagnetic energy and receive radiation from their surroundings. The electromagnetic energy radiated by a body can be detected by means of suitable detectors called sensors, and is called the spectral "signature" of the body.

Bangladesh crop signature was standardised by Sparro in a project involving scientists from agriculture institutions like Barc, Bari, BRRI, SRDI etc. It is signifi-

cant that Sparro estimation is done before, or at the time of, harvest, whereas the BBS report comes months later. Hence, prompt action can be taken, using results from satellite technology.

Bangladesh took advantage of this situation, and I shall cite only two examples in this regard. In 1997, there was a drought in the country, and I noticed that price of rice had started increasing (as happened this year) during the harvest.

I looked at the Noaa satellite imagery, which showed that the harvest was less than normal. We sent some ten to twenty teams of scientists to designated spots in the country to verify the results, and I also participated in the survey of some areas. The farmers reported that there was no rain during the flowering stage of the crops and, as a result, there had not been proper grain formation; consequently, the yield had been less, especially in highlands where there were no facilities for irrigation.

We estimated that the loss could be around 2 million tons. I at once reported the result to the agriculture minister. My estimation was eventually accepted, though there was some hesitation initially. The minister

announced in the press that there was a shortfall of two million tons of rice, which would be procured immediately. The increase in the price of rice in the market stopped thereafter.

Another example is the disastrous flood of 1998. The author had the distinction of predicting the flood a month in advance. The flood lasted two and a half months, extending up to September, and there was hardly much scope for re-plantation. There was large-scale damage to amon crops. This time, we estimated crop loss to the tune of 4.5 million tons. This was given to the press, and also in the government website.

The BBC had forecast that two million people would die in Bangladesh as a result of this dangerous flood. A donor's meeting was called, to which I was also invited. Usually, a person of my position is not invited to such a meeting. But as my name had come in the press, I was invited. I told the meeting, which was also attended by government representatives, that 4.5 millions tons of rice had to be transported to Bangladesh immediately by air, by sea and land to save the people from starvation. Actually, some 5 million tons of rice were pro-

cured. Nobody died of starvation and there was no price increase.

Thus, the bottom line is that the shortfall has to be correctly estimated, and the needed quantity has to be procured in time, then there will not be any price rise. The demand has to meet the supply, as proclaimed by the economist guru Adam Smith. If the Bangladesh people consume 20 million tons of rice a year, and if there is a shortfall of say 2 million tons, and if there is no procurement, people either starve or eat less; which is reflected in the price rise.

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Dr. A.M. Choudhury is former Chairman, SPARRO.

# If the world could vote

For different reasons, both China and India have come to appreciate the virtues of Republican presidents, who tend to be more predictable. Republicans also traditionally favour realism in geopolitics and support free trade. Bush may be unpopular in America, but he is beloved in India, more so than even Bill Clinton. This is owing to the U.S.-India nuclear deal, a powerful gift that legitimises New Delhi's nuclear and great-power status.

KISHORE MAHBUBANI

THE U.S. Presidential election may be the most undemocratic in the world. Only some 126 million Americans vote, yet the result is felt by 6.6 billion people. Indeed, in some ways, it matters even more to non-Americans. The president is constrained domestically by many constitutional checks and balances, but this is far less true in foreign affairs.

Nevertheless, the world has yet to pick its favorite. It is clear, however, whose election would have the most dramatic effect: Barack Obama's. In one fell swoop, an Obama victory would eliminate at least half the massive anti-Americanism now felt around the world. Eight hundred

million Africans would get a tremendous boost to their self-esteem and cultural pride. A son of their soil would, for the first time, occupy the White House, and many would whisper, approvingly, "only in America."

Obama is not a Muslim, but the 1.2 billion Muslims around the world would take great interest in his middle name, Hussein. Indeed, the election of "H" would immediately undo much of the damage "W" has wrought. W pushed hard for the democratisation of the Islamic world, but H's election would accomplish far more. Young Muslims would quickly start asking why America can elect a young Hussein when their own states are stuck with aging, visionless leaders. Obama has said that "the United States

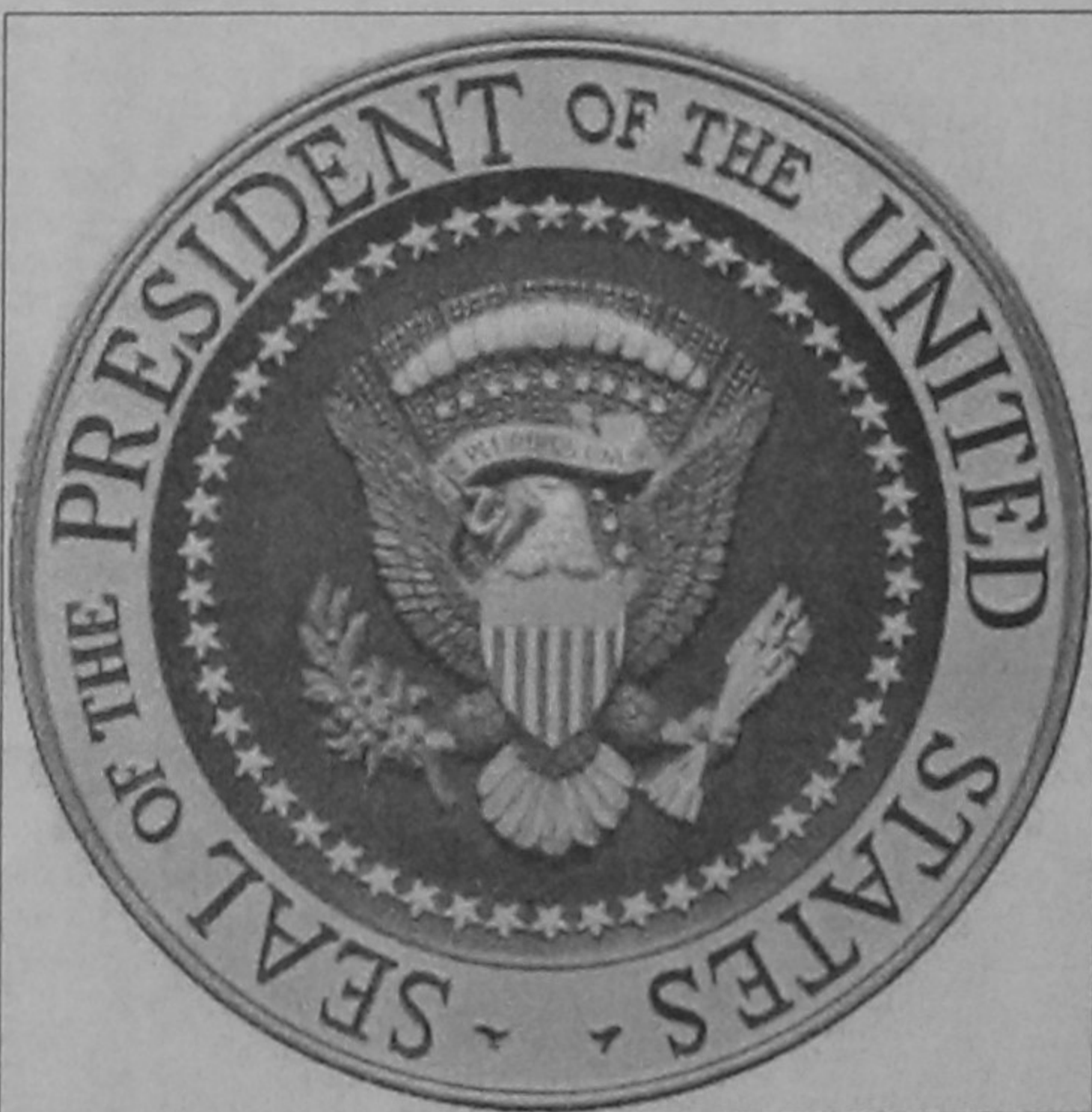
is seen as arrogant and aloof" and that "the world will work with -- not against -- U.S. power if it is put to principled use and directed towards common goals." Were he to implement this thinking as president, the world would become a much happier place.

Of course, not everyone would be overjoyed. The Europeans would be the most cynical. For ages, they've believed that the world pays the price for American inexperience, and many would, thus, rather hope that Hillary Clinton becomes president (and they'd be happy to accept Bill as part of the package). She is careful, cold and calculating; Europeans like that. She would also be well received by Latin Americans, who still

love Bill and who would note the interesting parallel with Argentina and the Kirchners.

It is harder to anticipate the reactions of the new rising powers: China and India. For both states the stakes are high, since the United States can facilitate (or hinder) their return to great-power status. It's no wonder that both have long since developed a sophisticated feel for the U.S. electoral process. Way back in 1972, Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai received a young Oxford student, Benazir Bhutto, in Beijing. Zhou, the lifelong Marxist, asked the westernised Bhutto about the McGovern-Nixon race. She confidently predicted a McGovern victory. Zhou replied by giving a comprehensive, state-by-state analysis that proved Nixon would win. He was dead right, of course.

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The world waits!

unpopular in America, but he is beloved in India, more so than even Bill Clinton. This is owing to the U.S.-India nuclear deal, a powerful gift that legitimises New Delhi's nuclear and great-power status.

That said, China and India are unlikely to favour the current Republican front runners. Their quiet preference may be for John McCain, who is by far the most experienced, is widely traveled, and knows the world well.

McCain's foreign-policy advisers are also decidedly centrist. It will be a surprise if he wins, but he will not pull any surprises if he does.

Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney, on the other hand, hold unknown views. And the world may not be ready for a Southern preacher. As for Rudy Giuliani, his relentless focus on 9/11 and his preoccupation with the dangers of the world show him to be frighteningly out of touch. The world is not, in fact, becoming a more dangerous place; as I document in my new book, the march to modernity is creating new Asian middle classes, in the hundreds of millions, who are responsible stakeholders and want to join America in creating a more peaceful and stable world order.

Unfortunately, even as the world is becoming more predictable, America is becoming less so. It has one of the least informed populations on the planet, and the quality of the presidential debates on global issues has been appalling. Bhutto's death provided the

candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their statesmanship toward a pivotal country. But they all failed this test, resorting to grandstanding instead. Hillary Clinton, for example, declared her longstanding friendship with Benazir but failed to mention Bhutto's many flaws. Bill Richardson excoriated President Pervez Musharraf and called for the elimination of U.S. aid to Pakistan, but failed to mention that Pakistan's long military rule was a direct result of U.S. support. Such statements betrayed an apparent failure to grasp the complexity of the world. By and large, the candidates have wasted the opportunity to provide new intellectual and political leadership to America and the world. This is probably the greatest tragedy of the race. There has never been a greater need for new U.S. leadership, yet the candidates offer little hope that this will come any time soon.