

## Political party reform

**In order to reform political parties, the character and command structure as exist must undergo a drastic change. Ownership of the party must be given back to the people. Democratisation of political party is a prerequisite. Leadership at all stages must be elected by secret balloting of the general members of that level. Decision making process must reflect the voices of the grassroots level members and top leadership must allow and make arrangement for participatory management.**

GHULAM MUHAMMAD QUADER

ONCE elected, representatives from political parties assume the role of governance of state, either by exercising executive power or by providing necessary guidance and cross-check of government activities. Elected representatives are provided with necessary power and authority, especially the members of the government.

Idea is that the power and authority would be used selflessly and in accordance within a broader legal framework in governing the country, accommodating the hopes and aspirations of the maximum number of people.

Power and authority given by the people to their representatives by electing them is expected to be utilised purely for providing service to the people. In no way, the representatives are to benefit directly or indirectly themselves or to provide benefit to their person of choice, abusing this authority. Selfless and fair are the desired qualities of a person exercising public authority

and funds.

All the objectives and activities of political parties and their members are thus to be selfless and fair and to be directed towards the benefit of the people. At least, theoretically, that is the idea. In case people feel otherwise they have the option of making necessary changes through the next election.

It is a well known and well accepted fact that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Once in power, the political party tends to corrupt itself by deviating from selflessness and fairness. In the absence of proper system of accountability the corruption progresses leaps and bound.

In the context of Bangladesh, not only that there exists lack of system of accountability, in addition an almost unlimited power has been provided to the chief executive through constitutional provisions.

To be in power has turned out to be a very profitable business for any political party and its members. Way to get or retain that business depends on officially winning the

election. So the manipulations of election results have come into picture. Influencing the election with money and muscle power or making election related administration and officials to serve partisan interest became business of the day.

Political parties had to recruit people with money (legal or illegal), muscle power of criminals, and while in power provide protection and prosperity to them for competing with others in election game. For the same purpose of winning election, party in power started recruiting, posting, and promoting people and dishing out business and other favors on party line instead of on merit. In the process, political parties turned out to be safe sanctuary and breeding ground for criminals instead of law-abiding selfless patriotic people.

Transformation of political parties into business house for conducting unethical business has also influenced the command structure to become corporate. Party leadership calls all the shots. General members cannot have any say on who would lead or what

would be the decision.

They are to execute or implement the decisions taken at the highest level. Political parties thus lost their designated role to represent people's interest as people by and large lost ownership of the political parties.

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Leadership at all stages must be elected by secret balloting of the general members of that level. Decision making process must reflect the voices of the grassroots level members and top leadership must allow and make arrangement for participatory management.

All financial transactions of the party must have transparency and must not be confined within a limited group of leaders at the top.

Election Commission has prepared a set of draft rules on the basis of the proposed People's Representation Ordinance 2008 (PRO 2008) now under consideration outlining conditions for registration of a political party. EC also had a series of discussion with all the political parties and received their views on that.

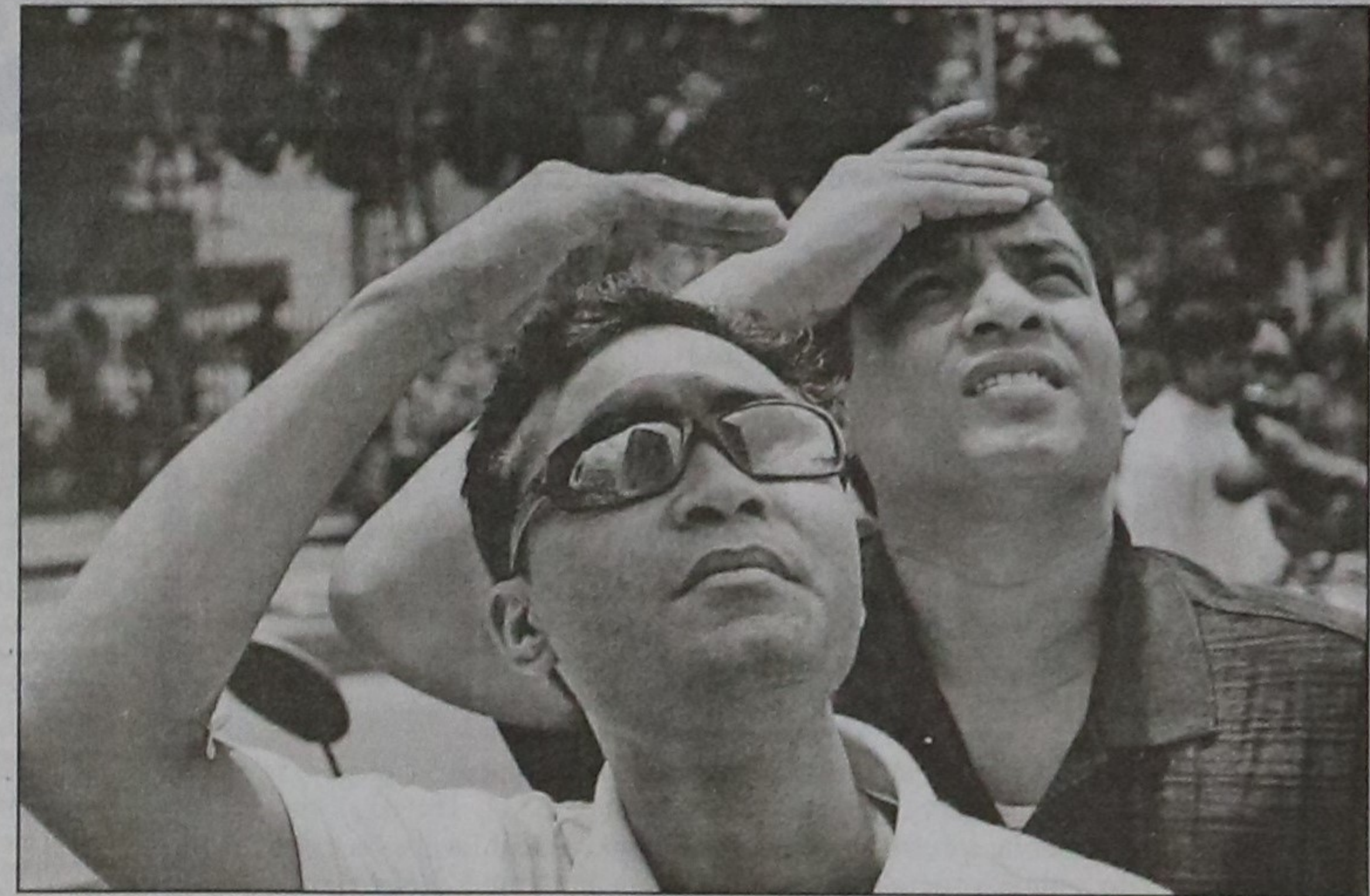
Democratisation and financial transparency within political parties have been adequately

covered to be ensured in the draft rule for getting and retaining registration at EC. In addition, many other pertinent issues which came into focus prior to and after declaration of state of emergency, like abolishment of student wings, trade unions, branch in foreign counties, etc of political parties were also included in the draft rules now ready for finalisation.

Some other issues also got importance during the public discourse. Important party post holders would not continue for more than two terms. Person holding similar positions would have to step down in case they accept a government responsibility like cabinet post. Those were felt necessary to break the corporate culture now existing in the parties. The mentioned draft set of rules for registration of political parties did not include those.

Draft PRO 2008 is still to be enacted along with the proposed set of rules for registration of political parties and code of conduct for election. All the political parties are waiting to finalise redrafting their party constitution in line with the EC's requirement. So, no reform work even on paper could be done so far.

There exists no defined and structured rule for formation or operation of political parties till date. So, political parties make their own constitution and operate party functions. It is alleged that most of the political parties do not



Reform on the horizon?

even follow their own party constitution.

The present party structure is built on feudal or corporate culture of king (or queen) and subjects. In presence of the existing leadership, who are looked as ruler or owner, it is not possible to start a true democratic culture and culture of financial accountability and transparency.

To expedite reform, the current leadership, especially the top-most leaders, must either relinquish position or voluntarily start

desired reform. So far, no such move could be seen by any political party. On the contrary, tendency as seen by majority and important leadership is to maintain the status quo.

Another sensitive factor in running a political party is party funding. In a country like Bangladesh a vast majority of political party members are poor. It is almost impossible for a political party to operate all its programs with the finance of the general members only.

Fund raising is a major cause of irregularity and corruption. Control of the party activities by big subscription or even acquiring leadership position with money is a major menace. This can only be controlled in case some funding arrangement from public exchequer to political parties can be worked out with due monitoring system.

Ghulam Muhammad Quader is a former Member of Parliament.

## Community cooperation in development

**Researchers have been rigorously searching for alternative ways of promoting effective cooperation. In the course of the search, there has emerged a convincing view that community members will cooperate only in particular situations, especially when they have a common interest and are convinced that the common interest can only be met by acting collectively. In other words, community participation and collective actions are most likely to be selective, and they are generally seen in the form of "selective and negotiated alliances."**

NAIAZ AHMED KHAN

OF late, there has been something of a consensus amongst the academia and development activists regarding the topicality and urgency of involving local communities in any meaningful development initiative or project. Notwithstanding such rhetoric and emphasis, however, the challenge of effectively engaging communities and ensuring adequate cooperation from them remains as daunting as ever.

Indeed, the history of community cooperation and collective action in voluntary and developmental activities is generally a dismal one, where successes are

often outweighed by failures.

Major studies on the experience of community involvement in developmental projects (especially in the context of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa) suggest that popular participation is a particularly complex issue, which is contingent on the surrounding socio-economic and political environment.

Often, planners have proceeded on erroneous assumptions about community. "Community" has been viewed as an undifferentiated, harmonious unit of cooperation, which, with some external help and inputs, would readily flourish into the most effective means of cooperation and development.

oment.

Accordingly, the expectations about cooperative actions have been high and, in many cases, disappointment at their actual results has been correspondingly bitter. These rather romantic assumptions have lately been widely challenged worldwide by prominent scholars.

In fact, there has been cogent scepticism about the prospects of community cooperation. Scholars representing this school argue that large, unorganised groups cannot produce collective action, even when they have common interests. Only when groups are small, or when they are fortunate enough to have an independent source of selective incentives, will they organise or act to achieve their objectives -- the argument further goes.

Such arguments are based on the assumption that man is a "rational" and "self-interested" being and will not act for "group-interest," unless coerced or "selectively" induced. This tone of pessimism on collective action is more popularly encapsulated under the phrase: "tragedy of the commons," which refer to a situation of unrestricted usage of an open access resource, where the future is totally discounted and everybody is motivated to extract as much as they want for the present without restraint, because the individual thinks that somebody else would later usurp all benefits.

In Bangladesh too, one may note that the extremely poor level of community hygiene, misuse of irrigation water, and lack of maintenance of local roads and canals may be some examples of the absence of collective action from the community.

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There are several contextual conditions which pave the way for generating cooperative action and sustaining it in the long term. It must be made clear at this point that the process of cooperation and the interplay of regulating factors therein are profoundly contingent on the specific contextual and regional realities.

As such, there cannot be any universal or generalised list of conditions for cooperation.

However, it is certainly possible to identify some broad conditions from many empirical studies and analytical commentaries on the pursuit of collective action in rural South Asia, as have been enumerated below:

### The nature of local institution

Proper institutional structure, which acts in conformity with specific contextual realities and demands, is imperative for the success of cooperative action.

Reorientation of state's role:

Here the key considerations are:

- State initiatives and interventions should not clash with the local traditional/indigenous institutions,
- "Blue print" imposition of some state sponsored organisational structure in the name of cooperative movement is unlikely to meet local conditions/demands,
- Transplantation of "successful cooperatives" (which have been proved to be successful in a specific area) into an alien context without due consideration of contextual and circumstantial differences is not likely to produce desired results,
- Heavy state interference in local cooperative organisations is usually inimical to success, a major reorientation of state bureaucracy is imperative in order to make it more responsive, sensitive and flexible to public needs and contextual demands.

This reorientation should include the following: shift from authoritarian to participatory styles, and from responsiveness to orders from above to demands from below; a service orientation with corresponding changes in the current elitist value orientation; providing extension services and technical support to local organisations and cooperative structures; decentralised planning and authority for dealing with local affairs; nurturing and fostering indigenous knowledge and community problem solving capacity. Control structures include:

- Punishment (or reward) for the breach of common rules (or abiding by the rules), and effective enforcement thereof,
- Detection of cases of free-riding;
- Motivating people about rules and prospective benefits of cooperation;



Working together towards the right direction.

## Mr. Prime Minister, keep your paranoia in check, please

SUTHUCHAI YOON

THAI Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej claims he isn't afraid to confront the opposition in parliament. But, in the same breath, he also says he won't accept the challenge of a legitimate debate. He is too scared to admit he is scared.

While he seeks sympathy from the public because "this government has been in office for only four months," Samak also claims, "we can answer any question from the opposition."

It's his typical loud-mouth, knee-jerk response to all major political issues and it has severely eroded his credibility to a point that seems irreversible.

It didn't have to be that way though. The Samak government

could have re-directed "streetside politics" back into a mainstream parliamentary debate. It could have effectively blocked the opposition Democrat Party from "conspiring" with the protestors at the Makkhawan Rangsang Bridge. But Samak's stubborn reaction has brought about a double blow that could bring down his four-month-old government in the next few weeks.

It was first proposed that the government defuse the ongoing political tension by resorting to Article 179 of the Constitution, which permits the administration of the day to take the initiative by calling a joint parliamentary session for a general debate. In such a case, no vote can be taken.

If the House debate were to

happen, the opposition's onslaught would be brutal but it could help take some heat off the marathon anti-government rally organised by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD).

But Samak went on television on Sunday to shoot down the Democrat Party's suggestion of a general debate. He also made things worse by brushing aside another censure proposal by a group of senators seeking to move a no-confidence motion against the government.

Once the main opposition party lodges a no-confidence motion against the Samak government under articles 158 and 159, the premier would be constitutionally prohibited from dissolving parliament in order to avoid the cen-

sure.

In other words, Samak, by trying to avoid a parliamentary battle, has triggered a full-blown political war. Quite a few political pundits predict that it will be a miracle if he manages to survive the upcoming multi-pronged attacks.

Hidden somewhere in Article 162 of the Constitution is the real threat to Samak's survival. Under this clause, MPs are "independent of their parties' resolutions" in submitting motions, debating and voting in a no-confidence motion.

In other words, MPs from the People Power Party, the biggest coalition member, as well as those in the smaller coalition parties who have found Samak to be a growing political liability to the

government's stability, will welcome this opposition's move to surreptitiously join in the creation of a "perfect storm" to get him out of the way.

He inadvertently revealed his growing sense of insecurity in his latest weekly show by starting his monologue with this introduction:

"My government is four months old this week. I have news for you. That means those astrologers who had predicted that I wouldn't last three months have been proved wrong..."

And on Monday, when organisers of the annual Prime Minister's Industry Awards at the Government House greeted his arrival with the traditional "Maharerk" tune, the premier's

mood, for no apparent reason, immediately turned sour.

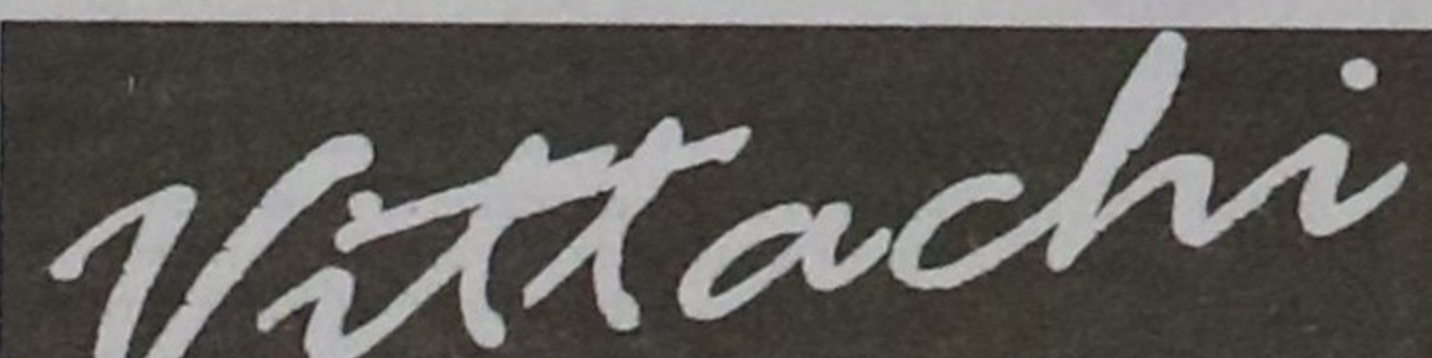
"Why did you play this song?" he asked. "You want to make this my last day on the job?"

The paranoia at the top is getting worse by the day. Psychologists would say that both the prime minister's emotional state, and his intelligence quotient level, are in need of a thorough check-up.

Obviously, we know it. And he knows it: a full-fledged no-confidence debate that is telecast live around the country will certainly be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Now you know why he is avoiding that at all costs.

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**ONLY IN ASIA**  
by Nury Vittachi

## The conquest of America and the Redneck tribes

TODAY, boys and girls, we are going to study an important part of world history: the discovery of America.

The first settlers from the civilized world, by which I mean Asia of course, travelled to the Americas by ship, discovering it more than 150 years ago. They landed initially in what is now called North America in the mid-1800s. Here's a poem to help you remember this: "In eighteen hundred and forty-two, Third Uncle sailed the ocean blue."

Now when the Asian settlers landed, they discovered there were already people living there -- a group of people known as the Rednecks.

Although the Rednecks were simple, primitive people, they had spread over many parts of the country. They had curious habits. Female Rednecks had white faces on which they put face paint made for them by a man named Max Factor. Richer ones wore animal skins as a sign of wealth.

Males Rednecks had no face paint but gathered every night for the ritual drinking of a foul-tasting firewater called Budweiser that send them into ecstatic states during which they saw visions and fell over.

It was observed that Rednecks greeted each other by raising their right hands and saying: "Whassup?" They had a deep spiritual connection with the land, which they referred to as "Real Estate." They divided it into small sections, which they sold to each other for empty promises known as "mortgages."

The Asian settlers were intrigued by the fact that the land had great potential, which was unlikely ever to be realised, since the inhabitants' main hobby was collecting firearms and shooting each other. Occasionally, one of the Rednecks would suggest abandoning this practice, but the others would simply blast him full of holes.

Furthermore, Rednecks spent millions building university libraries

ies but never entered them, preferring to spend their study hours bowling.

Not wanting to upset the natives, the Asian settlers started off in the railroad and mining businesses and then crept up the social ladder. The settlers' children enrolled in Redneck universities, took over the libraries, and rose to dominate math, science, computing, medicine and so on. They became surgeons, financial controllers, systems analysts and programmers.

Since many Asian settlers were math geeks, it was easy for them to go to Redneck casinos and wipe out the locals at blackjack and other card games.

Non-academic settlers discovered that the primitive peoples in North America had been subsisting since time immemorial on only inedible British-style food-like substances, such as "baked shoe leather" and "hot water bottle au gratin."

So they introduced them to food, which actually tasted of something. Rednecks were of course immediately enchanted with the stuff, and hundreds of thousands of outlets selling everything from curries to char siu opened up all over the New World.

These days, the Asians who discovered America live in peace with the remaining indigenous peoples there. Asians run the place, of course, but are wise enough to let the other tribes think that they are in charge.

The locals have not yet noticed that Asians have the best jobs earning the highest salaries in the key sectors, and label them as "inscrutable," meaning "smarter than us."

But today, it is considered politically incorrect for Asians in America to refer to the indigenous people of the country as Rednecks.

They are now known as "staff."

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