

ACC meeting expectations?

According to ACC, the perceived guru of corruption has accumulated wealth of less than 10 crores as opposed to the common belief that thousands of crores has been plundered by him. The disclosure of this meagre asset accumulated legally or illegally, would only establish his honesty not only among his supporters but to the common people as well. In fact, even according to the estimate of ACC, I have not seen many whose total wealth surpassed more than 5 crores. If this is so, it seems our politicians are very honest indeed!

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

ONE of the most commendable acts of the current CTG is the reformation of the ACC with its new leadership. Since its reconstitution, people had a lot of expectations that it would work independently and impartially with its reinvested mandate to bring to justice those who have betrayed the people's trust by plundering state money and have abused the state authority for their personal gain. After eighteen months or so, it is high time to evaluate how far the ACC has succeeded in meeting people's expectation.

If one looks back, it would be obvious that the ACC has been able to put a few hundred people, mostly politicians, behind bars, broadly on three grounds: firstly, accumulating wealth disproportionate to one's income; secondly, undisclosed wealth in the wealth statement, and finally, evasion of income tax. How far these allega-

tions have impacted psyche of the common people in forming any stigma about those who have either been convicted or under custody to await trial?

If one looks at the first one, it would be hard to find that many, especially in the political arena, who would be able to account for their accumulated wealth. That being the case, it is not transparent to the people the index that was used by the ACC to prepare the list of the potential wrong-doers and their subsequent internment. The wealth of a few big shots as disclosed by the ACC is so meagre, in the context of present Bangladeshi elites, it would, in fact, tend to establish their honesty in the minds of the masses, not the other way around.

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legally or illegally, would only establish his honesty not only among his supporters but to the common people as well. In fact, even according to the estimate of ACC, I have not seen many whose total wealth surpassed more than 5 crores. If this is so, it seems our politicians are very honest indeed!

Secondly, disclosure of the actual wealth was a two-way sword for the discloser. If one discloses his actual wealth, he could be directly admitting his ill-gotten part of the wealth for which he might not have paid income taxes. If one did not disclose the actual income, he could be found guilty of concealing his wealth, which if discovered by the ACC, could charge him also of evading the income tax. In a few major cases, this undisclosed wealth never exceeded 3 crores, while most of them were in the spectrum of lakhs. Still better, if the prosecutors could have discovered and divulged how the ill-gotten wealth was acquired to provide a clear picture of the alleged crimes

to the people.

Lastly, most of the accusations and convictions were due to non-payment of income taxes. This is a serious crime in countries where every earning resident pay income taxes. According to NBR statistics, only around six hundred thousand people of Bangladesh pay income taxes while 15 million out of 150 million are eligible to be a part of the process. It means only 0.4% pay, 9.6% evade and the other 90% are not wealthy enough to pay the income taxes. So it is naturally unlikely that the non-paying 99.6% of the people would seriously concur with the ACC's view and drives to punish only a few of those 15 million, who should be in the tax net to start with, for evading a part of their due taxes. Any judicial legal proceeding cannot ignore interjecting community norms and values into it to validate its criminal statutes.

The ACC chief has traveled all over the country to exchange views with the common people. It was expected that he would get the people's view about their perception about corruption in order to avoid any boomeranging effect of the prosecution and conviction in one or more of the afore-said charges.

In addition, the selectivity of the ACC and the government is so obvious that one does not need a microscope to detect it. For instance, out of the six city mayors, five are behind bars, with a lone

exception, the stories of his wanton corruption occupied pages of the print media weeks after weeks. Even the ACC accused him of possessing the highest amount (around 10 crores) of ill-gotten wealth among all the accused.

Nevertheless, he is still flying the national flag on his car and is getting bail and extension, one time after another, without any attempt by the ACC counsels to appeal against the bail order. The same is true for some politicians, the foremost among them was Matur Rahman Nizami, whose bail order by the HC was not appealed as because the lawyers of the ACC "were too tired and there was no pressure from the government to do so." Quite to the contrary, the government counsels, especially the recently resigned attorney general, was quick to appeal against any HC decision that went in favour of Sheikh Hasina.

As expected, the highest number of cases was filed against Tarique Rahman, the man who had allegedly been at the centre of the rampant corruption that had permeated every sphere of the society in the five years of the immediate past regime of BNP-Jamaat led four-party alliance government.

Although he reportedly controlled every aspect of the state and the government ranging from the civil administration to political agenda, from BNP's political office Hawa Bhaban in the capital, he is



So where's the money?

so far facing a lone trial in the case of Tk 21 crore bribery following the murder of Humayun Kabir Sabir, a director of Bashundhara Group, despite being detained for over a year and a half now.

In a self-evident selectivity, right before the recent CC election, the ACC submitted charge sheet against interned Sylhet City Mayor Badruddin Ahmed Kamran for allegedly concealing information about his family's wealth worth

over Tk 7.21 lakh.

However, both the ACC and the government failed to carry the people with them in selling the merits of the accusation, since it is the people who are the ultimate arbiters in dissecting the fact from the fiction in people's court, thereby repudiating or rehabilitating a public figure. The glaring proof was the landslide victory of Kamran in Sylhet CC election, where people creating a historical

precedence, in each of the 120 precincts, expressed their resounding verdict against the merit of the ACC charges and the apparent selectivity of the government in prosecuting charges.

This is the right moment of soul searching for the ACC to evaluate why their actions are out of tune with the people.

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Take two

Although North Korea had no connection with 9/11, the Bush administration saw danger in North Korea's combination of totalitarian rule and ongoing interest in nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. Along with Iran and Iraq, North Korea was enshrined as a charter member of the "Axis of Evil" in the 2002 State of the Union speech.

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NORTH Korea's nuclear development efforts have bedeviled US policymakers for more than two decades, resulting in international crises during both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. With the end of the second Bush administration, it's now possible to grade the handling of the current crisis in light of past efforts and understand the scope of the challenge confronting the next administration.

The Bush administration came into office with a Clinton-era 1994 Agreed Framework in place that had the appearance of freezing but not eliminating North Korea's nuclear development efforts. That agreement promised delivery of 500,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil annually until completion of construction of two 1000-megawatt light water reactors in exchange for North Korea's return to compliance with international safeguards under the

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Construction of the reactors was originally envisioned to be completed in 2003, but delays in IWR construction meant that when the Bush administration came into office, it was still on the hook to deliver 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil annually and the North had not yet resolved a dispute with the IAEA over whether North Korea might have reprocessed enough material for one or two nuclear weapons.

However, as long as the agreed framework was in place, North Korea's ability to produce plutonium remained contained. Clinton administration critics had characterised the agreed framework as having kicked the can down the road -- delaying a tough stance on North Korea's nuclear program. Moreover, under the Clinton administration's watch, North Korea covertly began to pursue uranium enrichment as an alterna-

tive route to plutonium reprocessing as a way to revive its nuclear weapons development efforts.

The Bush administration's foreign policy team came into office skeptical about the Clinton-era agreements with North Korea. With some officials eager to roll back the agreed framework. An ill-fated early meeting with President Bush embarrassed South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung, who was rebuffed in his appeal to promote engagement with North Korea.

Following 9/11, the situation worsened. Although North Korea had no connection with 9/11, the Bush administration saw danger in North Korea's combination of totalitarian rule and ongoing interest in nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. Along with Iran and Iraq, North Korea was enshrined as a charter member of the "Axis of Evil" in the 2002 State of the Union speech.

The trigger for the second North Korean nuclear crisis was rising concern that North Korea had

received assistance from Pakistan's A.Q. Khan network in pursuit of a covert highly enriched uranium program in violation of the agreed framework. North Korean officials initially admitted, then denied, the existence of the program during the visit of US special envoy James Kelly in October 2002. Following these revelations, the crisis escalated rapidly as the US cut deliveries of heavy fuel oil through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization to North Korea. North Korea responded by withdrawing from the NPT, reprocessing plutonium stored following the 1994 shutdown of the Yongbyon reactor and resuming operation of the reactor to expand its fissile materials inventory.

The Bush administration supported the establishment of the Six Party Talks -- including North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia, the US and China -- in 2003. Bush characterised North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons as a "regional problem" and announced the objective of "comprehensive, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement." But the administration forbade bilateral US-DPRK meetings at the Six Party Talks, resulting in a virtual stalemate through 2004.

Bush administration policy

shifted in early 2005 as North Korea upped the ante by declaring itself a nuclear-weapons state and demanding arms-control negotiations. Although the administration rejected those North Korean positions, Kelly's successor, Christopher Hill, was authorised to conduct bilateral talks with the North Koreans within the six-party framework. Hill led intense negotiations that resulted in the September 19, 2005, Six Party Joint Statement, which essentially envisioned a grand bargain: North Korea would denuclearise in exchange for economic assistance, establishment of a permanent peace regime and diplomatic normalization with the US and Japan.

A US Treasury announcement made only days prior to the announcement of the Joint Statement targeted a Macao-based bank under Section 311 of the US Patriot Act for facilitating North Korean money-laundering and counterfeiting. That resulted in North Korea's decision to boycott negotiations. The stalemate lasted for more than a year, until North Korea conducted missile and nuclear tests in July and October 2006. These tests drew universal condemnation in the form of two UN resolutions, the second of which

imposed but fell short of implementing stiff economic sanctions.

The nuclear test also catalyzed a last-ditch round of diplomacy that resulted in North Korea's return to the Six Party Talks in December 2006. That meeting led to a secret round of US-DPRK talks in Berlin that set the framework for a February 13, 2007, six-party implementing agreement in which North Korea pledged to disable its nuclear facilities and submit a "complete and correct" declaration regarding its nuclear program with the initial phase -- disabling the Yongbyon facilities and "discussing" the list of its nuclear programs occurring within 60 days in return for delivery of the first 50,000 of an eventual 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil or equivalent and a US pledge to begin delisting North Korea from the US terrorist list and repeal the Trading With the Enemy Act.

However, after 18 months, the Bush administration decided to move first in exchange for a North Korean limited declaration that omitted reference to the alleged uranium-enrichment program or alleged proliferation of nuclear technology to Syria. It's up to Bush's successor to finish the job of denuclearizing North Korea.

The Bush administration failed to

contain North Korea's covert nuclear developments in its first term, ironically choosing policies that facilitated its capacity to expand a small nuclear arsenal. Although the second administration has gained commitments in principle from the North to achieve full denuclearization, implementation to date has resulted in a situation in which North Korea's capacity to expand its nuclear arsenal is "frozen" -- or under the Bush agreement, "disabled." North Korea's denuclearization remains an aspiration -- not an accomplishment.

Thus, a new US administration will inherit essentially the same problem that the Bush administration inherited, although North Korea now has an expanded stash of fissile material at its disposal. Although North Korea's capacity to make more materials is contained and the next administration will not face immediate crisis, it's urgent that the next administration make clear that a nuclear-capable North Korea will not stand as part of a new status quo in Northeast Asia.

The successive and bipartisan policy failures of the past two decades illustrate that any conclusive deal with North Korea will likely be accompanied by buyer's remorse. The best strategy for achieving North

Korea's denuclearization, as politically unpalatable as it may be in Washington, will be to affirm that the foundational principles embodied in the September 19, 2005, Joint Statement still stand as an attainable objective and promote concrete efforts toward full implementation of those goals.

This means both insisting that North Korea fully implement its denuclearization obligations by strengthening coordination among regional partners to compel North Korea's denuclearization through both word and actions while actively pursuing a diplomatic relationship with a denuclearised and normalised North Korea. Such an approach should recognise that the existence of a relationship is the prerequisite for pursuing progress on even harder issues and should require that North Korea's viability depends on its ability to conduct "normal" economic and political relations on a give-and-take basis rather than relying for survival on handouts from its Northeast Asian neighbors.

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Inside Barack Obama's southern strategy

The theory is the same: to generate a sky-high turnout among young voters and among the region's heavy concentration of African-Americans. Skeptics call the projections unrealistic and the strategy a fool's errand.

HOWARD FINEMAN

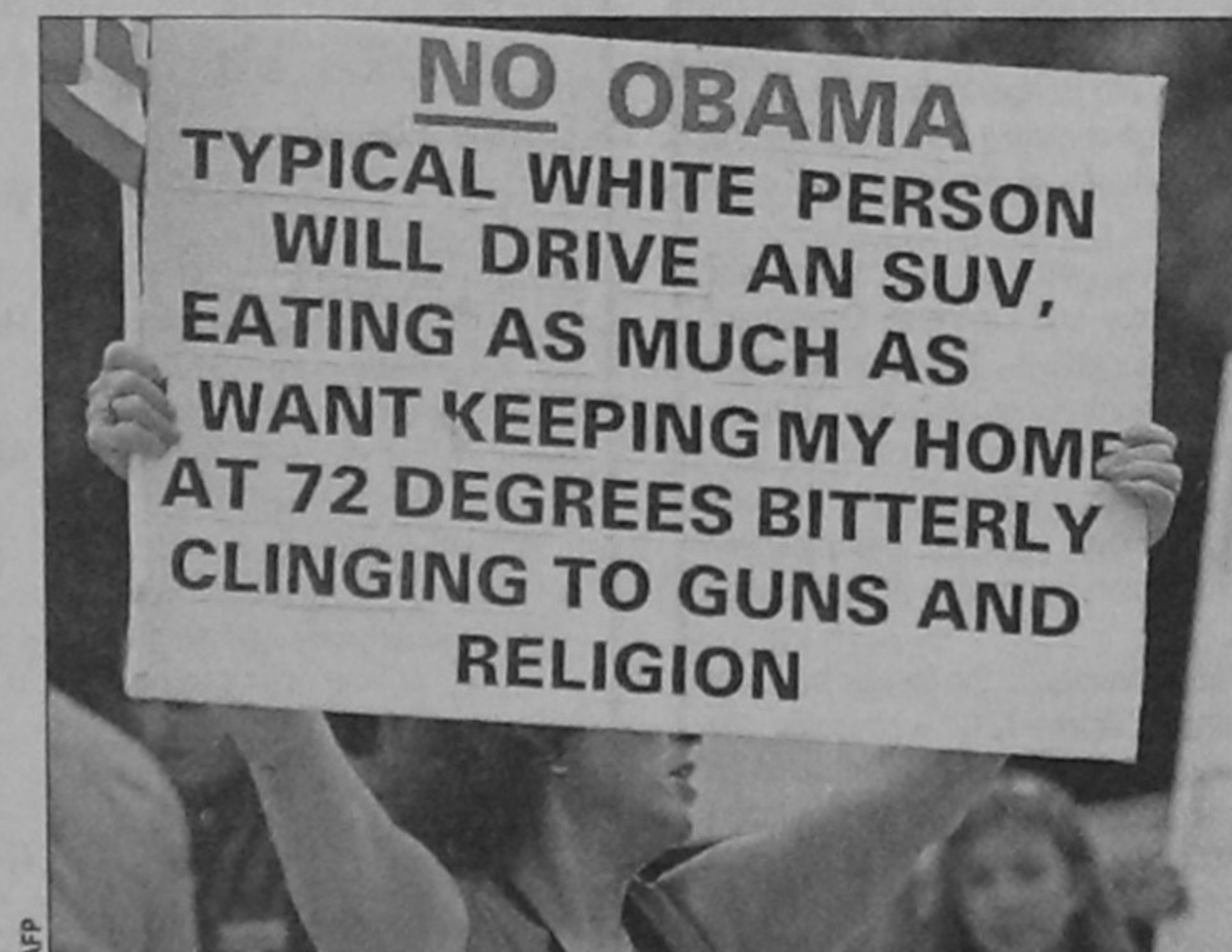
AS a well-traveled field organizer for Senator Barack Obama, Jason Berry lives on Facebook. But it wasn't of much use when the campaign sent him to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. An agricultural region that lies just beyond the gravitational pull of Washington, DC, the valley is populated by rural Southerners who network the old-fashioned way -- face to face. So Berry's first move was to dispatch volunteers with sign-up sheets to the July Fourth fireworks celebration in Winchester, the largest town in the valley. Now he's concentrating on bake sales, barbecues, air fairs and other get-togethers that remain central to country life. Berry's -- and Obama's -- goals are two-fold: to register and turn out supportive voters, of course, but also to create a web of locals who will testify to their personal belief in the candidate. "They're character witnesses," says Berry.

Obama needs them -- in the valley and elsewhere in the South -- if he plans to make good on his pledge to compete seriously below the Mason-Dixon line. It is a region that essentially has belonged to the Republican Party since the 1960s. Even Virginia, which has been turning blue as its Washington-

area suburbs mushroom, hasn't voted for a Democrat for president since LBJ in 1964.

Undaunted by history -- or the fact that he is a Yankee with a liberal voting record -- Obama is committing staff and major TV advertising in three Southern states: Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia. In all three, the theory is the same: to generate a sky-high turnout among young voters and among the region's heavy concentration of African-Americans. Skeptics call the projections unrealistic and the strategy a fool's errand.

Except in Virginia. "It's in play, no question," says Michael DuHaime, Senator John McCain's political director. This pivotal moment was years in the making. In 1989, the state elected the nation's first African-American governor, Democrat Doug Wilder. A new generation of voters with no connection to the Old South has flocked to the Washington suburbs for defense and high-tech jobs. In this decade, Virginia has elected successive Democratic governors, both of them immigrants to the state. The first, Mark Warner, is expected to easily win a US Senate seat this year; his reverse coattails could help Obama. The current governor, Tim Kaine, could wind up as veep on the ticket. As for McCain,



Not everyone's a believer.

DuHaime points out that the GOP candidate has strong appeal in the state's vast military establishment and among independents in the suburbs.

Smart-aleck analysts declare that Virginia is no longer a Southern state. But that is only half true. Winchester sports a fancy wine bar, but the Confederate soldier statue still stands just down the street. Rebel general Stonewall Jackson harried retreating Union troops through town in 1862. A century later, a Winchester-based political machine, run by the late Harry Byrd Sr., led a "Massive Resistance" movement against integration. Even though Warner and Kaine ran as NASCAR-loving centrists wary of taxes and of gun control, they got whacked in the valley. "It surprises me that

Obama's campaign is penetrating here," says Adrian O'Connor, the editorial page editor of the Winchester Star, which is still owned by the Byrd family.

For Berry, the Obama organizer, the key is not to come off as an alien "penetrating" force, but as an unassuming fellow eager to help the locals unlock neighbor-to-neighbor sentiments in a region that the GOP has long taken for granted. "There are lots of disgruntled Republicans coming to us," he says. As the McCain campaign counterattacks -- calling Obama every name in the book -- Berry will have to rely on his new network idea -- "that friends will tell friends: we believe in Barack, so it's OK if you do, too."

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Where have you gone, John?

The Obama campaign's new mantra is that McCain is "an honorable man running a dishonorable campaign." Lame is more like it. And out of sync with the real guy.

JONATHAN ALTER

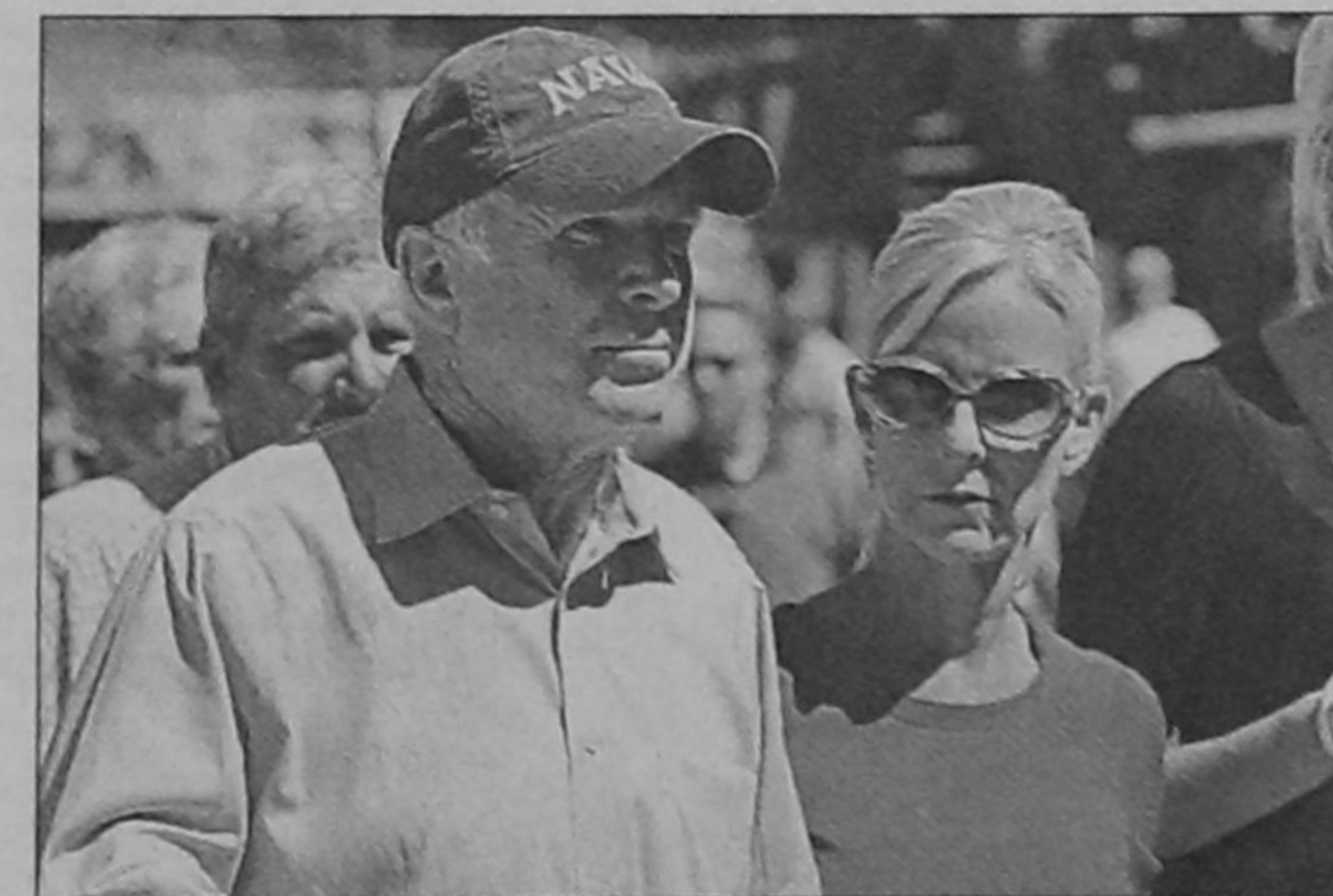
HIS zesty attacks on corporate greed and inspiring plans national service are no more.

In the middle of John McCain's dopey Britney & Paris attack ad, the announcer gravely asks of Barack Obama: "Is He Ready to Lead?" An equally good question is whether McCain is ready to lead. For a man who will turn 72 this month, he's a surprisingly immature politician -- erratic, impulsive and subject to peer pressure from the last knucklehead who offers him advice. The youthful insouciance that for many years has helped McCain charm reporters like me is now channeled into an ad that one GOP strategist labeled "juvenile," another termed "childish" and McCain's own mother called "stupid." The Obama campaign's new mantra is that McCain is "an honorable man running a dishonorable campaign." Lame is more like it. And out of sync with the real guy.

Of course, it might work. Maybe depicting Obama as a presumptuous and vaguely foreign presence will resonate. (Why else would one of McCain's slogans be "An American president for America"?) Maybe voters will agree with McCain campaign manager Rick Davis, who played the fussy card last week by arguing the central importance to the future of the republic of

Obama's taste for "MET-Rx chocolate roasted peanut protein bars and bottles of a hard-to-find organic brew called Black Forest Berry Honest Tea." (Davis somehow forgot to mention McCain's own preference for \$520 Ferragamo shoes.) Maybe convincing nervous white voters that Obama is another Al Sharpton or Jesse Jackson in his use of racial grievance politics will carry McCain to the White House.

But this is not 1988, when Vice President George Bush turned Michael Dukakis into an unpatriotic coddler of criminals. (Bush that year had a popular president and a strong economy behind him.) And it's not 2004, when his son Swift-Boated John Kerry. (The president would have likely won anyway by playing on post-9/11 fear.) This year, McCain is running under a tattered Republican banner, with more than 80% of the public thinking the country is on the wrong track. Without some compelling vision beyond support for offshore drilling, the negativity may well boomerang. "It's hard to imagine America responding to 'small ball' when we have all these problems," says John Weaver, McCain's chief strategist in 2000 who was pushed out of the campaign last year. With the exception of Mark Salter, who is still friendly with Weaver, the rest of McCain's high command says Weaver is just bitter and disloyal. "Actually, it's



McCain and his wife at an Iowa state fair. Is he ready to lead?

being loyal," Weaver says. "I want him to win." He's despondent over the destruction of a priceless maverick brand. McCain's zesty Theodore Roosevelt-style attacks on corporate greed and inspiring plans for expanding national service are gone, replaced by Karl Rove's playbook. "When was the last time you heard the word 'reform' or 'service' come out of his mouth?" Weaver asks. "We need to return to the John McCain who speaks his mind. Instead, it's Dick Butkus running a West Coast Offense or Wilt Chamberlain playing point guard. It's not going to work."

That's because McCain is patently insincere when his heart's not in it, like a little boy who eats his peas when his parents tell him to but remains transparently unhappy about the experience. It's not clear how committed McCain himself is to this latest assault on Obama.

Does he genuinely believe that Obama is an out-of-control egomaniac who thinks he's Moses? McCain no doubt comforts himself that the ad making that argument -- an argument that is beneath a major-party candidate for president -- was not part of a big media buy but just chum thrown to the media piranhas via the Drudge Report.

McCain's erratic campaign has GOP strategists scratching their heads. The obvious play for him was to tack right during the primaries, then navigate back to the center, where American general elections are always won. Conservative base voters can rarely be turned into McCain enthusiasts. But most will reluctantly vote for him. So why jeopardise his standing with independents by being grouchy and partisan? Makes no sense.

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