

Democratise yourselves

The ownership of PPs must be given to the people to make them pro-people. All committees and leadership are to be elected through secret balloting, decisions are to be taken in open forums, and accounts of all financial transactions must be made transparent to the public.

G. M. QUADER

In a democratic society, political parties (PPs) are formed for the purpose of representing the people's views and fulfilling their hopes and aspirations. Accountability of the PPs is to the people, and on the basis of the said purpose. Ownership of the PPs has to lie with the masses to ensure that.

In most developing countries, the behaviour of the PPs does not coincide with the expectations of the people. Most of the PPs are formed, or are transformed, into parties that play the power game.

Winning the election and capturing state authority by any means become the focal point of all their activities. Once in power, PPs tend to fulfil self and group interests, and also try to stay in power by manipulating the election process as a whole.

Weak state institutions, ineffective administration and law enforcement, pervasive corruption, and distorted political culture

and understanding have allowed the PPs to stray from serving the interests of the people, and become profit making institutions run by self-seeking opportunists.

Efficient running of the party towards achieving that sort of distorted goal necessitates dictatorial leadership and secrecy in decision-making and financial transactions. Inter-party democracy becomes the casualty, along with transparency in decision-making and financial management. The top leaders assume the role of owners and the other members turn out to be subordinate employees.

PPs under the above category do not represent the people and their ambitions. Instead, they represent the top echelon and the members of respective PPs. Accountability of political parties, thus, becomes limited to its patrons, members and supporters, and not to the general mass.

In the context of Bangladesh, it may be said that not all political parties have come down to that stage. But there should be no

doubt that most of them, including the important and bigger parties, may be considered similar and comparable.

Parties that fail to represent the people may not be considered democratic, even if they are elected.

Democracy was formally restored and parliamentary form of government introduced in 1991 by making necessary amendments to the constitution.

Subsequent governments under different PPs ran the country in an autocratic way without following any system of effective accountability. They concentrated on their own welfare, and on using manipulative means to perpetuate power. This created a reign of mal-governance, pervasive corruption and looting of public funds by ruling party people and their cronies.

The situation reached a climax during the period of the last government. The people were deprived of their dues in terms of material, rights or services from the government, and had to suffer harassment

and miseries as a result. The election process was grossly manipulated. The election for the ninth parliament had to be abandoned in view of a nationwide protest.

The activities of the PPs are generally not considered to be "pro-people" all the time, instead they are "pro-party leadership" or at best "pro-party members." PPs do not seem to be accountable to the people, only to their leadership. Interestingly, the leadership in almost all cases does not need to be accountable to anybody.

Framing of the above provisions in the law is a welcome step. But, how much of those would be implemented in the real sense? Would it be pragmatic to expect the EC to effectively monitor those and ensure such a dramatic reversal of existing culture? Or would it be just a law with all the pious intentions, not to be followed in real life like many other reformatory laws?

The implementation of the law, its practice, and subsequent success of the reform agenda can be possible if people at large share the responsibility of monitoring the same. Here comes the role of the Right to Information ordinance, 2008 (RTI ordinance, 2008).

Until reforms are carried out in the existing political culture of the PPs, there is reason for at least some PPs to hesitate in accepting



Rebuilding from the bottom up.

TANIR AHMED DURK NEWS

effective barrier against corruption and other underhand activities.

Under the circumstances, PPs may display their commitment for effective reforms, and an improvement of political culture to achieve good and accountable governance, by registering the parties, maintaining all conditions as per the amended RPO act and putting the issue of RTI in their election manifesto. They may also consider declaring that they would do everything possible for proper and effective implementation of both the acts.

G. M. Quader is a former member of parliament.

A tribute to Ted Kennedy

Senator Kennedy had spoken against the atrocities, rape and persecution against the Bengali population in East Pakistan, who were passing through a nightmare during the operation of the Pakistan army. Ten million people had to flee to India for shelter. Being overwhelmed by the stories of atrocities, Senator Kennedy planned to visit East Pakistan, but he was not allowed to do so.

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

I am writing today to pay respect to Senator Edward Kennedy, popularly known as Ted Kennedy, not because he fired up Democrats at the opening session of the National convention of the Democratic Party on August 25 in Denver, but because for his dedication to just causes and justice to the people of the United States in particular and the world at large.

Subsequent events have proved that Senator Kennedy was on the right track. For the last 46 years he has been fighting for the issues that benefit the people of the country. His themes are civil rights, workers' causes, national health insurance, and immigrants' problems.

36 years ago, Senator Edward Kennedy rose in the Senate to speak against the Republican President Richard Nixon, who sided with the military dictator of Pakistan in 1971 and dispatched arms to Pakistan.

Senator Kennedy had spoken against the atrocities, rape and persecution against the Bengali population in East Pakistan, who were passing through a nightmare during the operation of the Pakistan army. Ten million people had to flee to India for shelter.

Being overwhelmed by the stories of atrocities, Senator Kennedy planned to visit East Pakistan, but he was not allowed to do so. I recall what Pakistan ambassador to the US, Agha Hillay, said in a telegram to the foreign office in Islamabad, a copy of which was sent to secretary of information, Altaf Gauhar, the most powerful secretary in Pakistan.

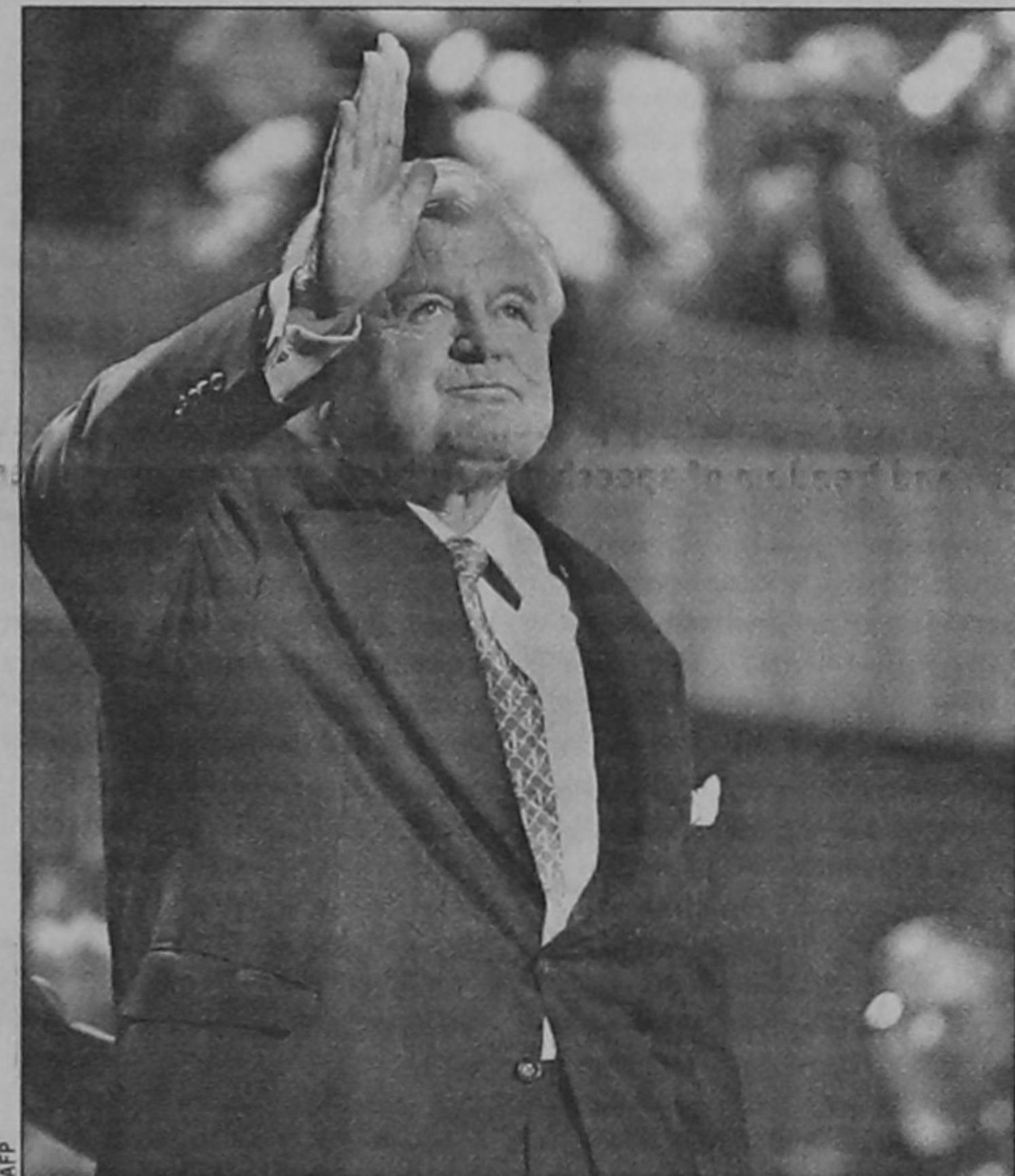
The most regrettable part is that President Nixon's Assistant for National Security affairs, Henry Kissinger, who became secretary of state under the Ford administration, did not recognise Bangladesh until Indian troops were withdrawn from there.

Senator Kennedy had chosen Dhaka University as the killing spree had begun there. The Ford administration did not recognise Bangladesh until Indian troops were withdrawn from there.

His feelings for the people of Bangladesh during the war will remain embedded in our memory.

We wish him early recovery from the deadly disease so that his dream "to greet a new Democrat president in the Senate in January" is fulfilled.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is former Bangladesh diplomat. He writes from Virginia.



True friend of Bangladesh.

was looking after America and Europe desk in the external publicity wing in Islamabad.

The refusal of entry did not deter Senator Kennedy, who flew to Calcutta in August 1971 to see the pitiable condition of the refugees in the make-shift camps. Back in the Senate, Kennedy began hearings on the refugee problems in September.

The most regrettable part is that President Nixon's Assistant for National Security affairs, Henry Kissinger, who became secretary of state under the Ford administration, did not recognise Bangladesh until Indian troops were withdrawn from there.

Senator Kennedy had chosen Dhaka University as the killing

spree had begun there. The Ford

administration did not recognise

Bangladesh until Indian troops

were withdrawn from there.

His feelings for the people of Bangladesh during the war will remain embedded in our memory.

We wish him early recovery from the deadly disease so that his dream "to greet a new Democrat president in the Senate in January" is fulfilled.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is former Bangladesh diplomat. He writes from Virginia.

China's winning ways

Hawthorne projected China would increase its medal haul from 2004 by 40 percent, from 63 to 88. Bernard saw China making more modest gains, up to 81 medals (with 37 golds), and coming in third behind Russia. Instead, China came in second in the medal total with 100, a 59 percent increase from 2004, and lapped the field in gold medals.

DANIEL GROSS

BEFORE the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, I wrote about economic models that aimed to pre-empt thousands of hours of television coverage, sappy features, and tape-delayed tension. John Hawthorne of PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Andrew Bernard of Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business both aimed to predict national medal hauls based on factors like home-field advantage, the size and growth of national economies, and past political affiliations.

So how did the economists do in the individual projection event? Both performed something like the American track-and-field team -- several high-profile triumphs and a couple of splashy pratfalls.

As was the case in 2004 -- here's the 2004 Olympics postmortem -- both analysts underestimated the strength of the US delegation. The final medal count from Beijing has the United States first in total medals with 110 (36 golds), followed by China (100 medals, 51 golds), Russia (72 medals), Britain (47), and Australia (46).

Bernard gets a 10.0 for nailing the steady performance of the Americans, having projected that the United States would win 105 medals, down only slightly from the 2004 total (108).

Bernard also nailed the number of golds the Americans would bring home, guessing 36 on the button. London-based Hawthorne, however, gets closer to a 2.5, predicting the US medal haul would fall 20 percent from 2004, from 108 to 87.

Clearly, the combination of

intense nationalism and rapid economic growth had a greater impact on China's results than might have been projected. Looking over the results from 2004 and 2008, there seem to be two other factors at work here: a post-hosting letdown or a prehosting boost.

I've noted in the past that one of the pitfalls of forecasting (political and economic) is to extrapolate from recent results. Greece turned in a great performance when Athens hosted the Summer Games in 2004 with 16 medals.

Both Bernard and Hawthorne predicted Greece would win 15 in Beijing. But the original Olympians had a very lame Olympics, winning only four medals and no golds.

There may also be a sort of pre-Olympics effect at work, by which the next country in line begins to kick it up a notch in anticipation of its hosting duties. Both Bernard (31 medals) and Hawthorne (28) projected a modest Olympics for Great Britain, but the Brits -- Olympic hosts in 2012 -- ended up fourth with 47 medals.

Another interesting trend: Despite the spread of wealth around the world and the increasing decentralisation of the global economy, the rich generally stayed rich. The top 10 countries won 532 medals in 2004, compared with 519 in 2008. The top 30 won 796 medals, up from 776 in 2004.

Bernard nailed South Korea and Cuba but misfired on Japan (40 projected, 25 won), Romania (17 projected, eight won) and Jamaica (fewer than six projected, 11 won). For his part, Hawthorne had France pegged (40), but he overestimated the performance of perennially emerging Mexico (three medals vs. a projection of eight) and underestimating the strength of Kenya's long-distance runners. (Kenya came in 18th in the nations' medal race but didn't register in Hawthorne's top 30.)

What accounts for the divergence between model and results? Both models include a home-country effect, which projects that host-nation athletes, fueled by crowds and increased investment, punch above their weight.

Clearly, the combination of

and macho men, reader Lisa Ip of Hong Kong said that every time her husband Bartek introduces himself, people say: "Eh? Martin? Barton? Burton?"

His professor got frustrated and decided to call him by his middle name, Jan.

"But he pronounced it 'Jane,'" Lisa lamented.

Bartek is large, beefy and powerful and really does not look like a

In the meantime, the men of

Predicting Olympic outcomes from a top-down perspective (as the models do) or from a bottom-up perspective (consulting experts in every sport and picking potential winners) is an extraordinarily difficult endeavour.

As I noted before the Games began, there's a big element of chance and randomness -- think of the one-one-hundredth of a second that separated Michael Phelps from Milorad Cavic in the 100-meter butterfly or the unexpected flubs of the American sprint-relay teams.

And I still maintain that these models have to take better account of cultural phenomena, such as a nation's openness to immigration.

Among the winners for the United States were gymnast Nastia Liukin (born in Moscow) and, my favorite of these games, Henry Cejudo, the 20-year-old son of illegal immigrants from Mexico who became the youngest American to win gold in wrestling.

Nothing is certain in this world. But it's highly likely that had Cejudo's family stayed in Mexico -- or if they had been deported soon after their arrival -- the United States would have won only 35 gold medals in Beijing.

© Newsweek International. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.



Marching towards the top.

A healthier drink than water

TAPE water is not only better than bottled water -- but it's healthier than filtered water, too. Yet beer is the best of all, reports reader Alex Goh, a Malaysian hydro-engineer.

Thanks, Mr. Goh. I shall adjust my children's drink intake list accordingly.

Mr. Goh, an expert in water systems, read the column on this page about tap water being healthier than bottled water and was inspired to share his own experience.

He was part of a team who installed high-grade purification equipment into the Carlsberg plant

in Malaysia, so can confirm that the beer was made from the purest possible water.

But his study of Malaysia's tap water produced surprises. It revealed that it had high level of chlorine. This is not dangerous unless the stuff combines with organic matter to form trihalomethane, a carcinogen, he told me. He found that normal tap water in Malaysia contained almost no organic matter, but the stuff that came out of home water filters often did.

Thus: in terms of health, at least in his part of the world, tap water is better than filtered water, but beer

was best of all.

Thanks, Alex: you have just made a lot of men very happy indeed. Next: I need you to use your chemical analysis skills to prove that eating chocolate fudge cake increases longevity.

This column today should be better written than normal, since I am going to devote the whole space to feedback from readers.

Contrary to what was stated in my column last week, the haggis and the bagpipes instead of the other way around. Your suggestion is good as it would improve the taste of one and the sound of the other." So there.

On the subject of having a name which suits your job, one reader pointed to the top writer of cowboy gun-slinger novels, whose name is Zane Grey. He adopted the first name "Zane" because he thought it sounded tougher than his real first name. His real first name was Pearl. Ouch!

But I did get some support from

and macho men, reader Lisa Ip of Hong Kong said that every time her husband Bartek introduces himself, people say: "Eh? Martin? Barton? Burton?"

His professor got frustrated and decided to call him by his middle name, Jan.

"But he pronounced it 'Jane,'" Lisa lamented.

Bartek is large, beefy and powerful and really does not look like a

In the meantime, the men of

million gods to choose from, it's easy. But, dogs are usually given an English name, such as Jimmy, Tommy or Johnny."

The English would probably take this as a compliment, since they're crazy about dogs. In England, the name "Rex" is reserved for monarchs and dogs -- although the press seems to respect dogs more than royalty.

In the meantime, the men of

Asia should raise a toast to Mr. Goh -- and make sure your glass is filled with a health drink, such as beer.

Sellers of water filters can complain to our columnist via www.vittachi.com.

Vittachi

ONLY IN ASIA

by Nury Vittachi



by Nury Vittachi