

## Return of the natives

Constitutional process cannot function without politicians. They are the custodians of public trust. Politics is all about honouring the trust to the best of one's ability. In all fairness it can be said our politicians have not been able to prove equal to national expectation. The tract record is dismal so much so that the constitutional process had to be rescued by 1/11. It is an indictment of our national politics.

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

FOR our national politics if 2007 was the year of breakdown, 2008 is the year of restoration. The year of breakdown began with the political locomotive rushing to the brink. It was stopped in its tracks by 1/11.

The passengers were disembarked and sent to cool their heels for a more sensible conduct on a newly laid track. Bangladesh saw a wholesale incarceration of its old and new breed of politicians. For good or for bad our politicians along with the dynasties were stigmatised. The country was left to believe that a new dawn of politics would emerge or the chastised politicians would come back with new ethos.

The year of the restoration started with mixed signals. Although this government is basically a rescue team, the unstoppable price hike dented its popular

approval to a certain degree. In a way the wind started blowing back to the sails of what looked like irredeemably compromised politicians. Besides, they found an issue about the justifiability of holding local body polls before national polls.

The government was faulted for an assumed tilt towards Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. She was allowed to go abroad without much hassle. Then it appeared that the flood-gate has been opened. The detainees started coming out in great number to indicate a restoration.

The chief whip turned acting secretary general of her beleaguered party has done enough penance for his errant son with his faithful espousal of his leader's trademark inflexible stand. The loudmouth of the party, as his detractors know him, has hinted at the last act of the play. The Awami League general

secretary has recovered and returned in time.

The octogenarian acting president of the party is in the media spotlight with his critical observation on the modus operandi and intention of the caretaker government. Both the parties have expressed their reservations about fulfilling Election Commission requirements on registration.

Restoration is going full circle. If recent City Corporation and municipal polls are any indication pre-1/11 political trend of the country has been resurrected. There is nothing to lament. What was to happen has happened. Representational politics has returned to the politicians.

Bangladesh has all along been a highly politicised country, although there is not much to choose between the Awami League and BNP. The birth of Bangladesh saw the baptism of Awami League as a



NURIN WAHID/DEIK NEWS

Back to the future?

left of the centre and secular political party in accordance with the gospel of its patron saint Bangabandhu. Since then it has shifted its stand because of electoral necessity and is today a centrist party that courts divine benediction (Sheikh Hasina's rosary beads and headscarf).

BNP was born in opposition to Awami League. It is slightly right of the centre if one considers its egalitarian marriage with big business. And yes, it is marginally Islamic. There is not much of a choice.

It is the inviolability of inheritance and popular support of the personal image that drive the two

parties. No amount of pious intention can make them follow a new course. It is the basic reality of Bangladesh politics. Every election will produce the same result. Even the system of government has been perfected to pay obeisance to the person. Election results only vindicate it. Parliamentary system of government has become prime ministerial form of government.

It is therefore neither practical nor sensible to expect a new breed or a new generation of politicians to emerge from the present stigmatised lot. Apparently the effort is floundering. The rationale behind reform may look justified but this

will only rally greater and renewed support around dynastic leadership.

For politics in a setting of Bangladesh's kind is all about staying close to the sun. The sun or the leader spreads favour and fortune. Naturally reforms fail. But there is always a lesson to learn from a trial that visits a nation: That this nation cannot go back to the violent, desperate, intolerant and extremist politics that traumatised the country before 1/11.

Violence is a fellow traveller of dogmatic politics that holds Bangladesh captive. Perhaps the toll of innocent human lives in Udichi

## What would a 4 degree rise mean for the planet?

What would a 4-degree rise mean for the planet? According to the 2006 Stern review on the economics of climate change, up to 300 million people would be affected by coastal flooding yearly. Water availability in Southern Africa and the Mediterranean could drop by half, and agricultural yields in Africa may be cut by up to 35%, with devastating effects for millions at risk of starvation, malnutrition and disease.

BILLY I AHMED

PROFESSOR Bob Watson, the chief scientific adviser to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and a senior UK government adviser warned of the risk of a rise in global temperatures of 4 degrees Celsius.

He said: "There is no doubt that we should aim to limit changes in the global mean surface temperature to 2 degree above pre-industrial

(levels). But given this is an ambitious target, and we don't know in detail how to limit greenhouse gas emissions to realise a 2 degree target, we should be prepared to adapt to 4 degrees.

But what would a 4-degree rise mean for the planet? According to the 2006 Stern review on the economics of climate change, up to 300 million people would be affected by coastal flooding yearly.

Water availability in Southern Africa and the Mediterranean could

drop by half, and agricultural yields in Africa may be cut by up to 35%, with devastating effects for millions at risk of starvation, malnutrition and disease. Many species could face extinction.

Worse, rapid runaway warming could be triggered -- for example, by the release of methane hydrate deposits in the Arctic -- rapidly increasing the temperature rise far above even 4 degrees. The idea that we should somehow "adapt" to such cataclysmic outcomes is deeply irrational.

Sir David King, the government's former chief scientific adviser, has backed Watson's call to "prepare for the worst." King said that even if a global deal could ever be agreed to keep carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere below 450 parts per million (ppm), there is a 50% likelihood that temperatures would exceed 2 degrees and a 20% chance they would exceed 3.5 degrees.

By contrast, Professor Neil Adger of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has rejected the call for "adaptation", describing it as "a dangerous mindset."

Unfortunately, it is considered "far-fetched" by some scientists that, under current policies, global warming will even be kept below 4 degrees.

A new report says that stabilising carbon dioxide at the required atmospheric concentration of 650ppm would need industrialised nations to "begin to make draconian emission reductions within a decade".

The report also warns the G8 promise to cut emissions by half by 2050, to limit the global temperature rise to just 2 degrees, has no scientific basis. Instead, this delusion could lead to "dangerously misguided" policies: "Political inaction on global warming has become so dire" that "nations must now consider extreme technical solutions."

These "geoengineering options" include dumping iron into the oceans to boost the growth of plankton (which absorbs carbon dioxide) and injecting aerosols into the stratosphere to reflect sunlight into space. As humanity teeters on the brink, the corporate media are sure to give increasing coverage to these dubious and risky "technofixes."

This much is clear: after more than twenty years of ever more urgent scientific warnings, and government and corporate obstructionism, have arrived at the edge of the climate abyss. Professor Watson's response to his own dire warning to "prepare" for a 4 degrees rise was to call for the UK to take a lead in research on carbon capture and storage (CCS).

This would need an "Apollo-type program" akin to the huge resources devoted by the US in the 1960s space race. So what does CCS entail? First, carbon dioxide is "captured" by separating it out from the waste gases emitted by power stations.

The CO2 is then liquefied and pumped into underground geological formations, such as former oil reservoirs, and thus "stored."

Proponents of this technology claim that carbon emissions from power stations could be reduced by as much as 90%.

The words "carbon capture and storage" have now become a standard buzz-phrase with "pollution permits", "joint implementation mechanism" and "tradable energy quotas".

Nexis newspaper conducted a database search for "carbon capture and storage" in the British press over the 12-month period of Sep 1, 2007 - Aug 31, 2008. The article reported that people who had been interviewed about CCS had, understandably, never heard of it: "They said it sounded dangerous and unnecessary... They don't like the idea of a quick fix or burying the problem. Most people would rather see a move to renewables and improved energy efficiency."

But when "the problem of emissions was explained", Nexis was told, "they came round a bit" and understood that "CCS could solve a problem over the next few decades. People are more inclined to accept it as part of a package of measures, policies and ideas."

As pointed out by its rapidly increasing media profile, CCS has been hyped into the foreground with serious discussion of alternative "measures, policies and ideas" left trailing in its wake.

Corporate energy chiefs have pushed CCS hard, a green-washing strategy to protect business interests, profits and power.

A recent report from Corporate Watch warns that CCS technology is unlikely to be proven, scaled up and in widespread use until 2030 at the earliest, and possibly not until 2050 -- too late to prevent climate chaos.

A welcome, but entirely inadequate, note of caution about corporate claims appeared in a Guardian editorial: "The idea of stripping pollution from fossil fuels is seductive - a quick fix to an overwhelming crisis." However, the paper added, "for countries that develop it there could also be big profits."

Corporate media coverage has buried the truth that CCS would be exploited to increase oil recovery: pumping carbon dioxide into ageing oil reservoirs causes forcing out oil that would otherwise stay underground.

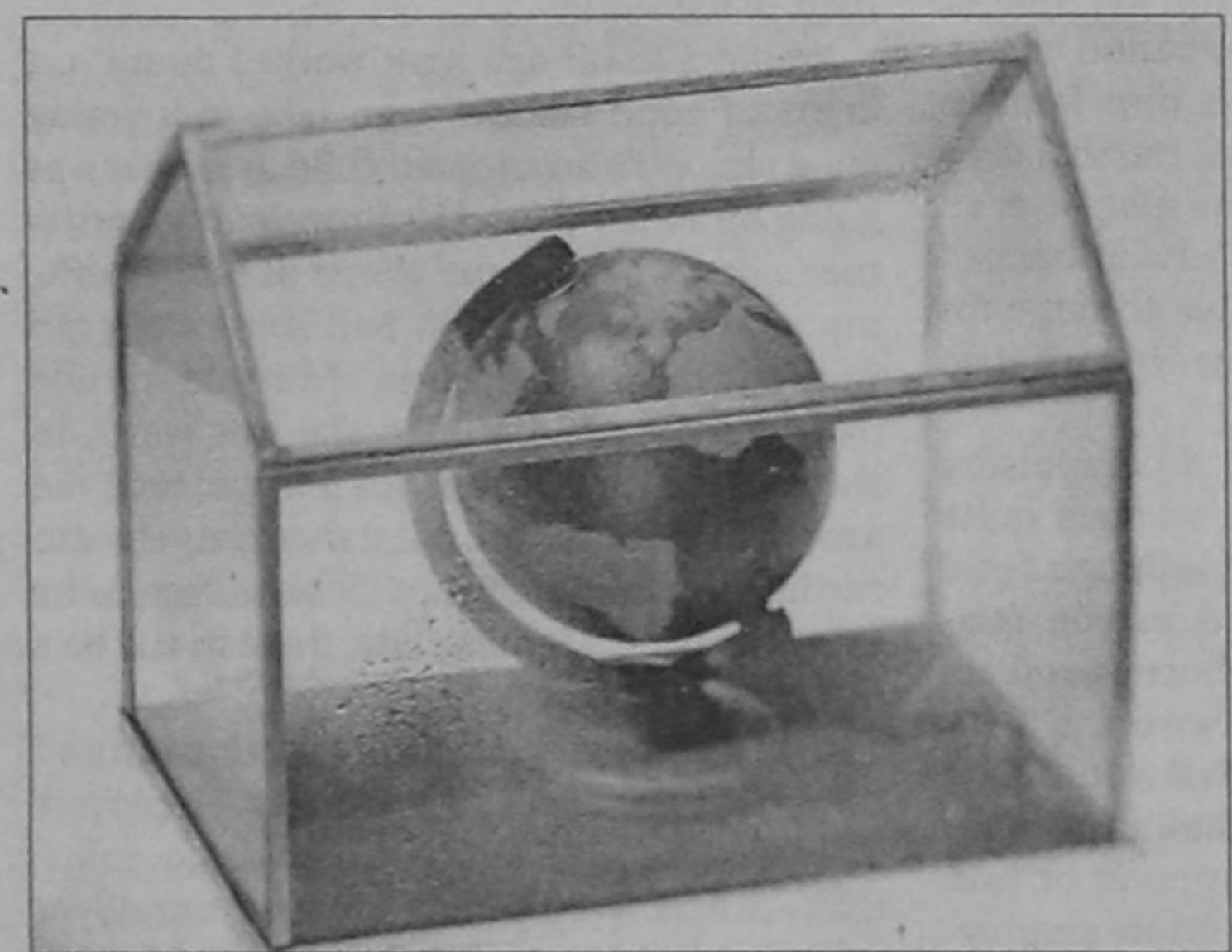
CCS and other technical "solutions" to impending climate chaos are thus being used to prop up the fossil fuel industry which remains committed to massive exploration and exploitation efforts for decades to come. David Hone, climate change adviser for Shell, concedes that fossil fuels will remain Shell's core business "for some time."

The push for CCS then and, indeed, for nuclear power is yet another outcome of pathological business greed. It is a fatal display of short-sightedness and arrogance which relies on technical fixes to tackle symptoms, rather than the systemic sickness at the heart of global capitalism.

One might as well feed beta-blocking drugs to an obese person with heart disease in an effort to prevent heart attacks, rather than address fundamental issues of health, diet and lifestyle.

If we can loosen, even a little, the crushing chains of corporate power and thought control, and then we still have a chance of averting disaster.

Billy I Ahmed is a tea planter, columnist and researcher.



LUC HAUITECOEUR

The optimistic solution?

## No foreign operations to be allowed in Pakistan

General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani said that the rules of engagement with the coalition forces are well-defined and, within that, the right to conduct operations against the militants inside own territory is solely the responsibility of the respective armed forces.

MAQBOOL MALIK

PAKISTAN'S military leadership made it clear that no external force will be allowed to conduct operations inside Pakistan and vowed to defend the sovereignty and integrity of the country at all cost.

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani made this statement while commenting on the recent incident where the coalition forces killed innocent civilians in a cross-border raid.

"There is no question of any agreement or understanding with the coalition forces whereby they are allowed to conduct operations on our side of the border," the COAS said.

He said that the rules of engagement with the coalition forces are well-defined and,

within that, the right to conduct operations against the militants inside own territory is solely the responsibility of the respective armed forces.

The COAS reiterated the need for a collaborative approach for better understanding of a highly complex issue.

He said that trust-deficit and misunderstandings could lead to more complications and increase the difficulties for all. The constraints of operating in these areas must never be lost sight of.

He re-emphasised that there are no quick fixes to this war. "Falling for short-term gains while ignoring our long-term interest is not the right way forward. To succeed, the coalition would be required to display strategic patience and help the other side the way they want it rather than adopting a unilateral approach

that may be counterproductive." He said that it is the multi-pronged approach, fully supported by the people of Pakistan, which will help us defeat the threat of internal terrorism.

Referring to his meeting with US senior officers on August 27, he said that they were informed about the complexity of the issue that requires in-depth understanding and more patience for evolving a comprehensive solution.

He said that own viewpoint was elaborated in detail and it was stressed that in such like situations, military action alone cannot solve the problem.

Political-reconciliatory effort was required to go along with the military steps to win the hearts and minds of the people. During the discussion, the imperative of public support at large for the



DICTATORSHIPWATCH.COM

Pakistan army operations okay.

military operations also came under focus.

Later, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen acknowledged the better understanding of ground realities by the COAS, and remarked, "he (the COAS) is committed to doing what is best for Pakistan and he is going to stay the same."

He reiterated that ultimately it is our national interest, which

and at present is committed to eliminate them from the affected areas of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Swat.

He said that Pakistan's security forces have given huge sacrifices in this war and it is the presence of the Army, which has denied the freedom of movement and operation to al-Qaeda and the affiliates. He added that it is support of the people of Pakistan, which would be decisive.

In a related development, the Core Commanders of the Pakistan Army are likely to meet on Thursday (September 11) with the COAS in the chair to discuss the situation that has arisen from the statement of United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen.

The meeting is expected to evolve strategy to tackle the new challenges.

Earlier, the leadership of the armed forces of Pakistan including the COAS General Kayani called on the President Asif Ali Zardari and had briefed him about challenges related to country's defence and security.

He said that Pakistan Army has conducted successful operations against the militants in the past



## The mystery of the gender-specific joke

WOMEN and men laugh at different jokes, scientists have discovered. Men chuckle at jokes simply for being jokes, while women analyse the situation in a funny story before laughing more selectively but louder.

This news comes from a study of the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, a comedy processor in the brain, quoted in a Reader's Digest special edition on humour out this month.

This discovery does not surprise me. When a piano drops on the Roadrunner's head in the cartoon of the same name, I laugh.

women in China don't have periods of good fortune alternating with misfortune. They only have misfortunes, as you know if you've read Wild Swans and all those other books.

When Chinese government officials realised that Mrs. Yang was the last native Nushu speaker, they bestowed upon her the nickname "Living Fossil."

What better evidence is there that men and women think differently? I mean, can you imagine a female choosing a name like that for herself? "Guys, I've decided to change my nickname from



Which gender would laugh at this?

My wife winces and says, "Ouch, poor thing."

But when we watch a movie about two marriage counselors having an affair, my wife is mightily amused, while I sit there and say, "So when is something interesting going to happen, like maybe a piano falls on someone's head?"

I was thinking about then when I stumbled on a report in my cuttings file, which said that the world's last speaker of Womanese had died. The 2004 death of Yang Huanying meant the end of a language with which women communicated "through a set of codes that were incomprehensible to men," reported Xinhua, the Chinese news agency.

Excuse me? Don't all women speak in a set of codes incomprehensible to men?

Most males quickly learn to avoid misunderstandings by opting for minimal communication.

The one thing that every man has thought, but possibly none has ever said out loud, is: "Why are you asking me? If you think you look fat in that, you probably do."

The late Mrs. Yang wrote and spoke a language called Nushu (in Mandarin, nu means woman and shu means writing) designed "to describe women's misfortunes," the news agency said. (Note that

Partygirl to Living Fossil as I feel it is more 'me'.")

Nushu or not Nushu, men and women communicate poorly, and in Asia this often leads to tragedy. Consider the sad case of a woman named Ueda who lived in Kameoke, Kyoto. She was in poor health, and felt she was a burden on her farmer husband.

So she decided to alleviate the pressure on the harassed man by stabbing him to death. "I caused my husband a lot of trouble. I killed him so as not to give him any more trouble," she told investigators who found the body in the bedroom, according to the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper.

I can't think of a more dramatic example of a disconnection between male and female logic. "I'm so sorry you're so stressed out, darling husband. I wish there was something I could do to stop you feeling stressed. I know. I'll stab you to death."

The situation would only make sense to a man if it appeared in a comedy movie and a woman decided to drop a piano on a man's head.

Now that's something a guy can understand.

Read our columnist's website and he won't drop any large objects on your head. www.vittachi.com.