

Those convicted taking part in election!

The question is of morality and clean politics

WE are flabbergasted at the airing of a demand by BNP joint-secretary general Nazrul Islam Khan to the effect that those convicted by lower and special courts be allowed to participate in the polls pending appeal to the higher court. Something on similar lines has also been advanced by AL acting president Zillur Rahman.

We find the argument for the convicts' participation in the election expedient, and even disingenuous.

From a legalistic point of view and technically speaking, their claim may have a basis as a convict has a natural right to appeal. But what about the question of morality? Here are men who have been found guilty of the charges levelled against them through a legal process in a court of law. And what is the background it was set against? We all know that it was corruption, more than anything else that brought about the present state of things. When people are longing for a better future, something that is not *status quo ante* at the very least, such a demand is disquieting. Rather than allowing them to take part in the election while we await disposal of their appeal in a higher court, we would like to turn around the argument to say that it's morally repugnant for them to seek vote from the people till they are exonerated by the higher court. Political parties owe it to the voters to appear before them with a clean image in contrast to an encumbered, blemished one.

Apart from the question of morality, BNP leader Nazrul Islam's argument is also untenable on practical grounds. He says, "we have nothing to say if a higher court upholds the verdict of a lower or special court". If that be the case, why can't political parties take the position that until a convicted person is not cleared by higher court, he/she will not get party nomination. Such a stance will show their commitment to "clean up" our politics and also strengthen the effort to fight corruption.

The leaders of major parties miss no opportunity in vociferously claiming how dedicated they are to clean politics and a new political culture in a bid to chime in with popular mood and expectations. But when the chips come down they seem to slide back into their old box again. The question is: do the political parties have none others than the convicts to field? Don't they have any new faces to offer? For all we know, they have plenty of perfectly deserving clean candidates in their ranks.

Changing of the guard in Male

Maldives' new leader has a unique opportunity

HISTORY has clearly been made in the Maldives. Three decades after he rose to power in the island nation, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has conceded defeat to a young politician who has just beaten him at the country's first openly contested presidential election. Mohammad Nasheed, the 41 year-old former dissident who has just defeated Gayoom, has promised that there will be no witch hunt once he forms his government in Male. That is certainly most commendable. And equally commendable is the grace with which the fallen Gayoom has accepted the verdict of the electorate following the second round of the voting. These are big things to note and absorb from a small country that has set an example in political and electoral probity.

The expectation now is that the new president will move quickly into giving Maldivians a new administration based on democracy and human rights. There cannot be any denying that when a politician serves a long time in power, a degree of atrophy sets in everywhere. That to a significant extent has been the case with the Maldives, where over the years Gayoom has exercised power in an authoritarian manner. Opposition has repeatedly been suppressed and even the newly elected Nasheed has been in and out of prison for years on end. Anti-government agitation has been violently suppressed and politicians suspected of being behind the disturbances have been carted off to prison. Even the respected Ibrahim Zaki could not escape Gayoom's wrath. The result was an atmosphere of intimidation that naturally led to growing discontent in the country. That discontent has now proved to have been purposeful. The people of the Maldives have spoken and by electing their new leader have demonstrated their readiness to join the club of democratic nations.

We wish the people of the Maldives well. Under their new president, we expect, they will move on toward building truly democratic institutions and thereby promote the principles of good governance.

Friends in need

Until that happens, according to some sources, Pakistan had hoped that China would improve upon its earlier largesse and deposit anything up to \$ 3 billion in our coffers. The Chinese and their hard-earned dollars are not so easily parted. A Chinese official explained: "We have done our due diligence, and it isn't happening."

F. S. AJAZUDDIN

IT reflected all the forlorn hope of a tail-ender, a twelfth man, the last of a dozen protocols signed between the Pakistan and China at Beijing on October 15. The final document was a Memorandum of Understanding between China's Cricket Association and the Pakistan Cricket Board.

That the Chinese should wish to learn the game from us -- once World Cup victors -- is understandable. They learn from the best and then outstrip their teachers. Just count the number of medals they won at the Beijing Olympics: 51

gold out of 100 at the Olympics, and 89 gold out of 211 at the Paralympics. Such laurels are not won by simply resting on them.

In the 1960s, we were an economic role model for the South Koreans, and our national airline PIA taught others (including the now unstoppably popular Emirates) how to fly. Our Tarbela Dam was the envy of developing countries for being the world's largest earth-filled dam. We played hockey and cricket better than the inventors of the game. Today, we have been relegated to a position of geo-political irrelevance, and geo-economic bankruptcy.

Shamefully, and worse still,

Here comes the sun



ZAFAR SOBHAN

STICK a fork in John McCain. He's done. He has been out-campaigned, out-thought, and out-classed by a better candidate. This has always been Barack Obama's best weapon -- not his soaring oratory or his ability to tap into the mood of the electorate or his unerring knack for being in the right place at the right time, on the right side of history.

Obama's most singular asset has always been that he is a cool, tough customer who knows how to run a cool, tough race. He is not just a preternaturally gifted politician with acute intelligence and palpable integrity, but he is also disciplined, on-message, determined, and steady as a rock.

He knows how to carefully plot out a campaign, first for the Democratic primary nomination against prohibitive odds, and then for the general election, and see it through to the end, staying calm and focused even as the world, and his opponents, implode around him. That is why he will be the next president of the United States.

Don't get me wrong. McCain can still win. Anything can happen. But if McCain does manage, improbably, to pull it out of the fire, if there is an early November surprise, for one reason or another, he will still never be anything more than an accidental president.

STRAIGHT TALK

Barack Obama may be that president. If he wins on Tuesday, the changes, one hopes for the better, will be felt in some way, small or big, in every corner of the Earth, including Bangladesh. Here's hoping for a Barack Obama victory on Tuesday. These last eight years have been a long, cold, lonely winter.

This US presidential election is like the one of 1932 and the one of 1980 -- an election that will fundamentally alter the course of the US and thus the world for the next several decades.

Obama has the potential to be for liberal Americans what Ronald Reagan was for conservatives, and he has the potential to do for liberalism what Reagan did for conservatism.

In 1980, the Democrats were out of ideas, hopeless, lost, confused, divided. It was only in the last few weeks that Reagan pulled ahead, and Carter might easily have won. But what would he have done with his victory? He had no vision to take the country forward.

Reagan had a vision, one that tapped powerfully into the prevailing public mood, and it was one he was able to sell to the American people. He moved the country dramatically rightwards.

In the late 1970s and 1980s almost all of the interesting intellectual ideas in America, both on domestic policy and foreign policy, was coming from the right-hand side of the political aisle.

I can't say that I much care for them, but the simple truth was that the Democrats didn't have anything to put up in response -- only old, stale, discredited ideas from the 1960s and early 1970s that were already past their sell-by date.

For the past three decades, Americans, and the rest of us, have been living in a world dominated by conservative ideas. Communism is as good as dead, and socialism and liberalism have long been in decline as ideologies.

But now, the times are changing. The pendulum is swinging back the other way. It is the free market ideologies and the dogmatic deregulators whose ideas are now looking worn-out and discredited, and the best, most thoughtful, most intellectually interesting work is now coming from those on the left-hand side of the political aisle.

The coup de grace was applied to the period of conservative ascendancy by the Iraq war and the global financial crisis. Both laid bare the bankruptcy, if you will pardon the expression, of the right wing's vision for the world.

We have learned that the neo-conservative foreign policy pursued by the Bush administration simply doesn't work, either for America or for the rest of us. The Bush Doctrine, the unilateralism, the my-way-or-the-highway approach to dealing with the rest of the world has been a failure, and, as a result, we are, all of us, living in a less safe world.

Secondly, we have seen the failure of unfettered free markets and unthinking deregulation, the

notion that less government is always better, and that the solution to every economic problem is lower taxes and less regulation.

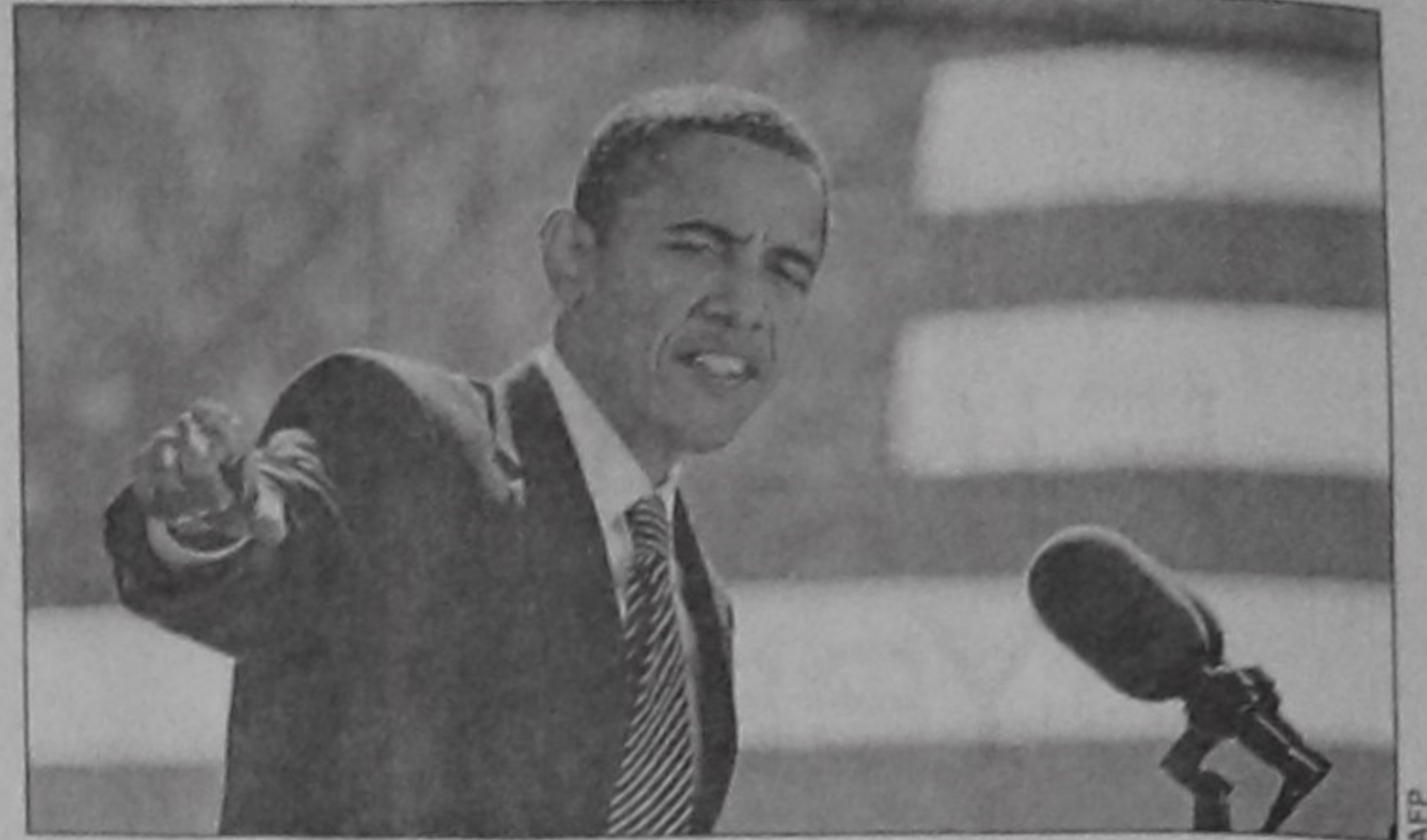
McCain, for all his protestations to the contrary, offers no sign that he has learned anything from the grim lessons of the past eight years, much less anything new. In this, he is not alone. His entire party is out of ideas.

Obama is the one who offers a bold and promising vision of the future, a vision that puts America in partnership with the rest of the world, a vision that believes that free markets work best when there is strict regulation and oversight, which believes that there is an important role for government to play.

The prevailing ideology in the Republican Party on so many issues, from global warming to energy security to financial markets, truly represents the point of view of only a few discredited, fringe thinkers. Almost all the experts, the authorities, those who have studied these matters, are on the side of the Democrats.

More importantly, after eight long years of George Bush, so are the American people. In terms of the policies they support, they overwhelmingly have had enough of the Bush policies. They want something new.

Barack Obama has the capacity



Morning in America?

to be a historic president. Not because of his race, though certainly that is a factor whose significance should not be underestimated, and the fact that the US might elect as president a man with an African father is indeed something to marvel at that speaks gloriously of the country and how far it has come.

No, the more significant factor is his capacity, as both someone who can channel the mood of the people, as well as someone who can lead the way, to help forge a new world.

To alter, fundamentally, America's relation to the rest of the world would be a worthy achievement. To preside over a period of responsible, people-centred growth and development would be equally commendable. To help usher in a time where the world is dedicated again to justice and equality would be truly historic.

As Bangladeshis, we often wonder what difference US elections make to us. But, of course, they make a huge difference. From the role of Nixon in 1971, to US hostility to Bangladesh's first government, to the US govern-

ment's current misguided outreach to those it mistakenly thinks of as "moderate Muslims," we can see that it can make a lot of difference to Bangladeshis who the occupant of the White House is.

Of course, the US doesn't have a Bangladesh policy, per se. It has a majority Muslim nation policy, into which we are shoe-horned. But if the new president decided to move beyond America's ill-advised policy of accommodation with political opportunists pretending to speak in the name of Islam, and tries instead to reach out to liberals, progressives, and secular voices in majority Muslim countries, then the outlook for Bangladesh brightens considerably.

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Here's hoping for a Barack Obama victory on Tuesday. These last eight years have been a long, cold, lonely winter.

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The shortcut is cutting us short



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

NESTLÉ and GlaxoSmith-Kline have been accused of lying about their products. Horlicks doesn't make children "taller, stronger and sharper," and Maggi Noodles doesn't strengthen bones and muscles in them either. Yet, such lies were packaged in the commercials of two of the world's food and pharmaceuticals giants, targeting their consumers in Bangladesh. Count your blessings everyday! Advertising Standards Authority of UK banned those commercials before they arrived.

The recent scandal of tainted milk is already causing enough heartburn. Melamine is an industrial chemical that raises the nitrogen readings and makes milk appear to be high in protein, causing kidney stones or kidney failure in infants. Milk companies also claim that they add DHA, a fatty acid, which is good for developing intelligence. Parents aspiring to raise smarter children fall for that kind of crap. What those compa-

nies hide is that DHA exists naturally in mother's milk.

At the heart of the global financial crisis is also a pack of lies. A group of crooked mortgage brokers, greedy investment bankers and oblivious rating agencies worked in cahoots. They mis-sold credit and mismanaged risk. The result is an economic meltdown, which, like a tsunami, is sending waves around the world.

These are but a few scratches on the surface of a nefarious underside. We have laced our lives with a bunch of lies, and those lies are finally catching up with us. As the old saying goes, what we sow is what we reap. We sowed lies and our lives are blanketed with drifts of falsehood from baby food to stock market.

So, the false claims made by Nestlé and GlaxoSmithKline don't come as isolated incidents. The fruit vendor sells fresh fruits sprayed with chemicals. The

CROSS TALK

From politics to business to every other walk of life, truth has been banished, like a street patrol conveniently withdrawn before a crime. Governments lie, multinationals lie, those who work for them lie, and their lies beget more lies. There is poison in food, fumes in air and toxins in water. Children are drinking contaminated milk. The truth of our lies is coming after us. The shortcut is cutting us short.

banks make unauthorised deductions from our accounts. Adulterated food, contaminated water, wrong medical treatment, police harassment, tilted justice, tampered academic results, false credentials, pretentious politics, one after another, lies have perpetuated lies. It has happened because, to protect our lies, each of us has covered up and created more lies. Nothing can be original in a fake world!

There can be no denying the fact that lies have crowded our lives. If anything is screaming at us today, it's the voice of truth that wants to breathe under the crushing burden of lies. In 2003, George Bush concocted the excuse of WMD to attack a foreign country. The world quietly accepted such a blatant lie and many "civilised" countries even rallied around the United States by sending their forces to Iraq.

If we use the allegory of a moun-

tainside full of snow, this particular lie worked like that last snowflake, which falls to cause an avalanche that buries an entire village. In last five years, as never before, the world has grappled with the shame of what happened in Iraq, and this American misconduct has trickled down to their elite groups, down to rest of the populations. The last trace of innocence was erased when the world's most powerful nation showed no qualms after it had lied to its people and rest of the world.

Lies are told because it works, and what works is success. When George Bush told lies about Saddam Hussein, it worked. It got him into Iraq, for oil, for revenge, for whatever, but definitely not to destroy WMD, which was never there. Everybody else is following suit. They lie because it works, because lies bring instant success, lies bring electoral wins, business

deals, court verdicts, immense power and windfall profit.

So what if the invasion of Iraq has cost somewhere between 946,000 and 1,120,000 lives according to a survey conducted by Opinion Business Research in August 2007? So what if a quarter of Chinese children drank Melamine-contaminated milk, countless more in rest of the world? What matters is that Iraq was conquered. What matters is that the milk companies made money. The end has mighty well justified the means.

Chalmers Johnson, a former CIA consultant, gives us an illustration of how that justification has spawned its many contradictions. The political system of the United States, for example, is an unstable combination -- domestic democracy and foreign empire. The country has 737 military bases in well over 130 countries, more than the number of US embassies in the world. The most recent manifestation of the American empire is Pentagon's decision to create another regional command in Africa, which may be situated either in Djibouti or the Gulf of Guinea.

This is but one more proof of how the United States doesn't practice what it preaches, a contradiction which has infiltrated the mores of the world. If we compare this civilisation to a fish then the rotting has started from its head. In this age of American influence, its moral depravity has

been infectious.

Military dictators are installed in power in the name of democracy. The United States and its allies possess nuclear power, but others are ordered not to have it. The country talks about peace while being the largest supplier of arms, the land of the largest military-industrial complex in the world.

Robert Noyce, inventor of the silicon chip, tells us that if ethics is poor at the top, that behaviour is copied down through the organisation. His observation encapsulates the modern crisis as our lives are submerged in false pretense. In so much as the American era and the American aura dominate the world, the hierarchy of invertebrate runs from George Bush to the bushman in Africa.

A lie corrodes truth with a certain vengeance, because if it exists, the other doesn't. That corrosion has destroyed our conscience. From politics to business to every other walk of life, truth has been banished, like a street patrol conveniently withdrawn before a crime. Governments lie, multinationals lie, those who work for them lie, and their lies beget more lies.

There is poison in food, fumes in air and toxins in water. Children are drinking contaminated milk. The truth of our lies is coming after us. The shortcut is cutting us short.

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billion from the Islamic Development Bank, and another \$1 billion from DFID. All of these are project-related and disburseable once projects have undergone the gauntlet of rigorous appraisal procedures.

Plan B is to approach the Friends of Pakistan, an informal gathering of friendly creditor-nations who are being asked to put their money where their hearts are. Although the first formal meeting is yet to be held in Abu Dhabi, US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher has chilled Pakistani expectations with his comment that "no cash" should be expected. It seems that while our friends are prepared to teach us how to fish, they are reluctant to trust us with the cash with which to buy the tackle.

Plan C, which is not really a plan at all, is to crawl to the IMF and to eat crow. It will not be the first time. Between 1998 and 2001, we entered into nine separate arrangements with the IMF. They know us all too well, with the practiced understanding of a family pawn-broker.

There is a feeling in official circles that, as the IMF will always be there anyway, other sources of fiscal support should be explored before going to a Shylock as the last resort. One can expect that whatever conditionalities the IMF applies to us, no matter how beneficial they may appear to be in the long run, they will be no more welcome than a penitent's hair-shirt.

It is time perhaps for us as a nation to learn the lessons we have been teaching others for so long. Rather than borrowing money from the Chinese, we could perhaps borrow their ideas. Once, the Chinese wanted to learn English so that they could spread throughout the world and then teach everyone Chinese. Perhaps they want us to teach them how to play cricket so that they can compete throughout the world, win the World Cup, and then teach everyone how to play Mahjong.

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