

With malice toward none

MEGASTHENES

TIME was when foreign policy was perceived as something almost academic, the province of the arcane, of interest only to a select few, the cognoscenti, and best left for them to deal with and conduct. It is no longer so. Foreign policy today relates to down to earth, mundane, and bread and butter issues that touch the lives of people. Four elements or criteria are crucial to policy formulation: Firstly, promotion of enlightened national interests. Secondly, conformity to certain universally accepted norms or principles. Thirdly, a robust sense of the realities that may not be ignored. And finally, public opinion, which is more a variable than a constant, as it can be shaped or fashioned. These elements do not always or necessarily pull in the same direction, and hence the need so often of informed judgment or statesmanship. A policy is formed only when commitment and power are brought into balance. Criteria have also evolved as to how policy makers may be rated from the long-term perspective. These include success in defining and achieving diplomatic goals, political and moral leadership that is brought to bear on foreign affairs, and the impact of policies on the course of history.

The most unsordid foreign policy initiative of the last century was possibly the Marshall Plan. Very simply the Plan involved the infusion of massive economic aid to revive Europe's war-ravaged economy. Europe was the direct and immediate beneficiary, but there were commensurate benefits also for the donor, the US, politically and in more concrete terms. First and foremost, it kept Western Europe firmly anchored to the US. Secondly, as Europe prospered, it could repay its debts to the US. Thirdly, Europe became a major market for US products. Fourthly, the US could thus make a smooth transition from a wartime economy to the production of civilian goods, without the disruption of unemployment. And finally it was a display of US power and presence in the most palatable and benign manner possible. There were no losers, no victims. The Nobel Peace Prize to General Marshall was merely the icing on the cake.

The most intractable political problem and foreign policy challenge today, one that affects, in some manner or other, most countries of the world, is the Palestine Question. Here may be discerned many of the ingredients that under-

lie or complicate any such problem: a lurking sense of history or geography, overtones of race and religion, and the overwhelming factors of energy resources and power politics. For the Jews it is a Return to what they consider their homeland by divine dispensation; a position that is not quite tenable in international law. Equally untenable would be any claim based on an occupation of 2000 years ago. For the Arabs it is yet another invasion. The problem is about the aspirations of one people and the rights of another, the dispossession and dehumanization of one people and the sense of security, and perhaps also plans of aggrandizement of another. An enduring peace can only be reached when these divergent and disparate aspects are reconciled.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, in a recent book, ascribed the Palestine Question to British chicanery and the Nazi genocide of Jews. The passage of years has in no way dimmed Aiyar's liberal and humanitarian instincts or refreshing candour. Not many would demur at his conclusions. There are two other factors though that would be germane. First there was the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, by which the Ottoman Turks, over decades, clandestinely sold Palestinian land to absentee landlords, who in turn sold them to the Jewish Agency, which just happened to be the executive arm of Zionism. Prior to the Code, the traditional form of land tenure was a communal usufruct that did not require registration of farm land. Under the Code, farmers, with long-standing rights, but who failed to register, could be dispossessed of their lands. The bulk of such expropriated lands eventually went to the Jewish Agency.

There was thus a creeping encroachment even during Ottoman rule. The other factor is the very special relationship between Israel and the US, the only country that can bring to bear the appropriate blend of pressure and persuasion to resolve the issue. The Israel lobby in the US is potent and pervasive. So much so that even George Washington's sage advice, in his farewell address, to never shape the nation's international relations on the basis of any "passionate attachment" to, or "inveterate hatred" of, any other nation, has all too often been ignored. With elections at the national level every two years, the safe and soft political option does have its attractions. Back, however, to the British role.

The Balfour Declaration, the bedrock of the Zionists' claim to Palestine, contained two crucial

LIGHTEN UP

The overwhelming reality today is that Israel is a regional power. It has unlimited access to the virtually inexhaustible resources of the US and enjoys its almost unqualified political support. Finally there is the factor of public opinion. Is public opinion in countries that still maintain a distance from Israel a more potent factor, or stronger on this issue, than in Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Morocco and India? There can be no facile or unambiguous answers to this.



Nov 1977: Sadat shaking hand with Sharon during his visit to Israel

provisions. It asserted that the British Government viewed "with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people", subject to the proviso that "nothing shall be done that may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine". This was conveyed in a letter dated Nov. 2, 1917 from Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour to Lord Rothschild. The caveat, or second provision, is little remembered today, perhaps it was never meant to be. There were also other "rubber promises" to the Arabs. The British accepted the Palestinian mandate at the Versailles Conference with some reluctance. In a memo to Lord Curzon in Aug. 1919, Balfour conceded that "so far as Palestine is concerned, the powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy... they have not always intended to violate".

Britain, during its mandate of 28 years, sought merely to "protect its interests with minimum cost and without thought to local aspirations". Between 1918 and 1939, the Jewish population in Palestine had increased by over 700%, from 60,000 to 430,000. By May 1939, the British felt that they had fulfilled their

pledge to help establish a "Jewish national home" in Palestine. They were also of the view that indefinite Jewish immigration and transfer of Arab land to Jews would be contrary to their promises to Arabs and also to Art. 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. This was explained in a White Paper. Winston Churchill was as staunch a friend of the Jewish people as anyone -- to Wavell he was a "confirmed Zionist". In 1919, as Colonial Secretary, he had interpreted British obligations to the Zionists under the Mandate of the League. Speaking in the House in August 1946, he declared that a Jewish National Home was to be set up in Palestine, but that Palestine was not to be a Jewish National Home. By November 1947, over 500,000 Jews had immigrated to Palestine. A country of 2,000,000 people had accepted more Jewish refugees than any other country in the world.

Wars have been fought in the Middle East over the Palestine Question, and Nobel Prizes have also been awarded for a peace that continues to elude. The search for an enduring and just peace, of course, goes on, as indeed it should. Palestinians have been the victims of a monstrous injustice. It is equally

true that Jews have for centuries suffered humiliation, harassment and persecution, and have even been cruelly parodied in literature. Their tormentors, in the main, were not Palestinians but God-fearing Christians, for whom it was an article of faith that the Jews, as a people, were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ and thus for decide. Until removed, during the pontificate of Pope John XXIII, the Good Friday liturgy of the Catholic Church contained a reference to "perfidious Jews". Historically Jews fared better in Arab and Muslim lands than in Europe and predominantly Christian countries. Too long a suffering, however, as Yeats put it, can "make a stone of the heart".

The Oslo accord in 1993, and the Rabin-Arafat handshake, afforded a glimmer of hope for a genuine peace. Some countries, which had avoided official relations and contact with Israel out of solidarity with the Palestinian cause, revisited the issue. India and China, for example, exchanged embassies with Israel. India handled the matter with exemplary finesse. Arafat was invited to India, feted and honoured with the prestigious Nehru Award, and informed of India's decision. He was assured that it did not mean any change of Indian policy; in effect it meant that the Palestinians would have a friend in Tel Aviv. India's decision was certainly taken, keeping in mind national interests.

Benefits could accrue in different ways. At the bilateral plane there could be cooperation in areas like agriculture and security-related issues. More importantly, perhaps, relations with Israel could be parlayed into closer ties with the US, both at the Government and the private sector levels. The only risk was an overall adverse reaction in the Arab world. As it turned out India gained much and lost nothing by its decision. US-India relations have been appreciably strengthened, though other factors surely also contributed to this. The US today is offering nuclear technology for peaceful purposes -- among other things -- to India, and Presi-

dent Bush is to visit the country soon. Bilateral ties have gone a long way since Dr. Kissinger -- according to declassified papers -- described Indians as "bastards anyway". The Saudi monarch recently visited India. He favoured observer status in the OIC for India, which he described as an energy partner. Mahmoud Abbas, the man in the eye of the storm, as it were, has also visited India.

Pakistan's recent decision to establish official contacts with Israel would have allowed for the above and possibly other factors as well. Incidentally both the Saudi monarch and Abbas visited Pakistan also, when they visited India. President Bush too is expected to visit the country. It is noteworthy that late Israeli PM Rabin visited Indonesia officially, that at the funeral of the late King Hassan of Morocco, the VVIP mourners included Israeli PM Ehud Barak, and that Israel established Trade Offices in some Gulf States. The OIC's Secretary General -- a competent and qualified individual -- is a national of a country which has diplomatic ties with Israel. All this would suggest that if a country adopts a principled position on the Palestine issue, its bilateral relations, or lack of it, with Israel does not weigh much with the bulk of Muslim states.

Further back in time, President Sadat's bold overture to Israel had yielded dividends for Egypt. With President Carter mediating, Sadat and Begin negotiated a peace settlement culminating in a peace treaty signed in Washington in March 1979. Under the treaty Egypt recovered territory lost in war and swiftly became the second highest recipient of US aid after Israel. Sadat and Israeli PM Begin had also drafted an ambitious document that covered a settlement of Gaza and the West Bank. Other concerned parties were, however, at that time not able or willing to keep pace with Sadat and Egypt for a time was virtually excommunicated by its peers. Sadat personally paid dearly for the move from which only benefits accrued to his country. Peace in the ME is not so much an

option as an imperative. Benjamin Franklin, the wisest of Americans in his time, never doubted that "There never was a good war or a bad peace". An enduring peace is best sought with feet firmly on the ground and gaze, just as firmly, on the horizon. The combination of the two has been the "alchemy of the ideal". Some new developments would bear upon the peace process: Sharon's illness and before that the Kadima Party he set up after parting from Likud, and the victory of Hamas in the Palestine elections.

As with Begin and Rabin, Sharon was never a "peacenik". A biography by Uzi Ben-Zion, "Sharon, an Israeli Caesar", affords a clear picture of the man, wars and all. In the early 1950's, at the instance of Moshe Dayan, Sharon formed a commando force, Unit 101. The Unit specialized in night raids and phony "reprisal raids". Its methods were provocation and revenge. Reportedly Sharon personally slit the throats of sleeping Egyptian soldiers, not exactly a charming, edifying or a pretty picture of the man. He emerged as the Israeli hero of the 1973 war, when in a daring manoeuvre he actually advanced to within 70 miles of Cairo. During Sadat's epochal first visit to Israel in Nov. 1977, he wished in particular to meet Sharon. At their meeting, Sadat said he had targeted Sharon for assassination. Unperturbed Sharon replied that in Sadat's place he would have done the same. In 1981, Sharon was complicit in the massacre of 800 Palestinians by the Phalangist army in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

The Economist observed in a recent issue that some might consider Sharon's war record as criminal. The one positive thing about him is that he has never been untrue to his people. Though incapacitated, his charisma lingers and Kadima enjoys more support in Israel than Labour or Likud. The egotistic Mr. Sharon was an improbable peacemaker but strange things have happened in history. Inveterate "red-baiter", Nixon, for example, opened up to China and one-time terrorist leader Begin made peace with Egypt.

The association of Peres has lent gravitas to Kadima. Peres may be likened to Moshe Sharett, Prime Minister of Israel in the interregnum of 1954-55, when Ben Gurion took time off for a personal experience of a Kibbutz. Sharett took his duties seriously enough to make considerable progress toward peace with Egypt. His efforts, however, were subverted by powerful elements within Israel. Sharett's diaries afford interesting insights into the psyche of early Israeli leaders.

Many in Israel and the US, and

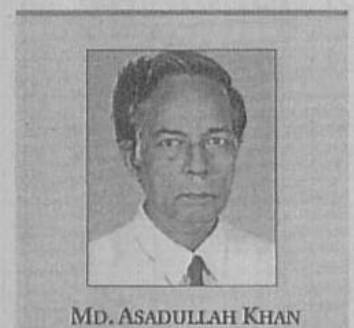
also elsewhere, would look askance at the outcome of the elections in Palestine, at least to the extent that it impinges on prospects for peace. A question they might wish to ponder is why the Palestinians voted overwhelmingly for Hamas. They may also recall that two former Israeli PMs headed notorious terrorist outfits, the Irgun and the Stern Gang, during the British Mandate. A litany of their grisly deeds would include targeted assassinations, and indiscriminate and concerted acts of terror. The Stern Gang even offered to collaborate with the Nazis, to mutual benefit, of course.

An assessment of recent developments in the ME, based on the guidelines for foreign policy formulation outlined at the outset, should be helpful in any analysis. It is reasonable to assume that a fair number of countries have reversed their "no contact with Israel" policy because they concluded it is not in their national interest to continue with it. There was and is a vital principle underlying moves to isolate Israel internationally: it is in support of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. It also makes the point that while borders may be negotiated, territorial aggrandizement through aggression is unacceptable in this day and age. Isolation, however, is perhaps no longer an effective tool to promote peace. A policy of boycott is a gesture of defiance. Defiance can be stimulating -- defiance in defeat was part of Churchill's creed -- but it may not be enough. There are also vast fields of constructive endeavour by which an enduring peace can be built. The overwhelming reality today is that Israel is a regional power. It has unlimited access to the virtually inexhaustible resources of the US and enjoys its almost unqualified political support. Finally there is the factor of public opinion. Is public opinion in countries that still maintain a distance from Israel a more potent factor, or stronger on this issue, than in Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Morocco and India? There can be no facile or unambiguous answers to this.

To govern is to choose, and to make policy or to take decisions also involves choices that are seldom simple or free of complexity. This was underscored, succinctly and felicitously, by Robert Frost in 1956, in a couplet addressed to Ahmad Shah Bokhari, then Under Secretary for Public Information at the UN:

From Iron Tools and Weapons To Ahmad S. Bokhari. Nature within her innmost self divides To trouble men with having to take sides.

Reforms in EC must for free and fair polls



Md. ASADULLAH KHAN

IN the political earthquake rocking the country, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) happens to be the predictable epicentre and with him the ruling alliance roping its way to put things to their convenience in the coming elections. No matter how hard the alliance leaders try to distance themselves from this imbroglio and assure the citizenry in meetings and rallies of a free, fair and peaceful election, they find themselves being sucked deeper into it. People's apprehension will always be there because the present government seems to be in a bid to frame things starting from transfer, promotion and posting of officials from the highest level down to upazila level. Worse, media reports suggest that the alliance government resorted to recruitment of election officers who they expect would spare no pains to protect the mentors' interest in the coming election.

People's perception goes contrary to alliance leaders' utterances. The business arena is gripped by a crisis of confidence. Beginning with the fertiliser crisis only a month ago and the recent fuel price hike and subsequent crises storming the country mostly because of the irresponsible utterances of some very responsible high-ups in the cabinet, chaos reigns everywhere from the market to the political front. As the alliance government struggles to address a range of social and economic ills, the last thing people can bear with is further tension. With the Chief Election Commissioner muddling up issues that were easy to handle at the beginning, things have come to a head. The nation now stands at crossroads.

It is true that the vacancies in the EC, long overdue, were to be filled up and as per constitutional provision there was nothing wrong in filling up the vacancies. But the time and persons chosen in doing that raised more questions than answers. Firstly, the CEC's appointment was not an unanimous one and even after his appointment to a constitutional post, as legal experts in the country say, he was to resign

from his former post as justice of the Appellate Division in the Supreme Court, which he didn't. Next comes the question of CEC's reported illness just at the moment the High Court ruling contesting the justification of preparing fresh voter list was available. Taking it for granted that he was really sick and that sickness prevented him from performing such a stupendous job at the most critical time of the nation, he could have refused to continue with the new job because he has another secure and lofty one at his disposal. At a time when the people in the country seek reassurance

posts while in service or after retirement." In the past decade there has been several instances when high-ranking members of the judiciary have proved that when it comes to acquiring or holding public position outside the bench, they won't let minor things like ethics stand in their way. People must be harbouring this fond hope that the Chief Justice may be thinking of formulating a self-regulating code of conduct in a bid to restoring the credibility of the judiciary by plugging the possible loopholes. Quoting further Justice A S Anand, "in a democracy, every holder of public office must be

Undeniably true, as CEC, in such a critical moment of nation's history, he has the toughest job as much as he has an unenviable job of keeping the people and the government happy. Doubtless, it is an enormously difficult but the most vital job. As an architect of new dream and clean ideas in presenting a free, fair and peaceful election, CEC M.A. Aziz could have transformed the moribund EC organisation into a dynamic institution that could deliver.

rather than confrontation, the President of the Republic should come out as a messiah. As for the alliance government, to restore its credibility that is eroding fast, it needs to exercise hard choices that require clarity, transparency and even ruthlessness.

Citizenry feel anguished at the decision of appointing two controversial persons as members of the EC at such a critical time. Transparency, as we know, is the oxygen of democracy. But in our dynasty-oriented democracy that is what is appallingly lacking. People are questioning as to how could a sitting judge could hoodwink or show such appalling disregard to such constitutional obligations. Commenting on the need for a code of conduct that would help usher in transparency and probity in the judiciary, former Chief Justice of India A.S. Anand said in 1999, "The judiciary is an institution which survives on credibility. Unbefitting conduct of any judge, of any level affects the credibility of the institution as a whole. Eternal vigilance by the judges is, therefore, necessary." Unless these questions are answered and enforced in the conduct of the judges who have just moved away from the bench, the image of the judiciary as a whole will sink.

As an eminent lawyer in the country observed recently, "The highest court must not be silent on judges taking up political and other

accountable to the people." Leaving aside this nitty-gritty, CEC's post was a constitutional one and he didn't or in no way was obliged to receive mandate from the government but as it appeared he was playing in the hands of the government that apparently created room for doubt, resentment and disappointment not only in the opposition circle but also among the total citizenry. Moreover, if the CEC had any novel idea about voter list preparation and if he had sensed any foul play anywhere which he couldn't solve through discussion with his colleagues, he could have appeared before the national electronic and print media to explain his point of view with specific instances of fake list that he had noticed without getting into squabble with other commissioners. That would have earned him credibility in the public eye.

What people expected of a sitting judge of the Supreme Court was strict neutrality in running such an important organisation before the national election. Aware of the fact that some High Court judges while working as CEC in the past made a mess in national elections as they were guided more by the dictates of the government that put them in that position than by the dictates of their conscience, the present situation was a unique opportunity for him to rise above any controversy. When honourable judges of the highest court in the country are

placed in such high offices as either CEC or Chairman of ACC, people have a fair expectation that these personalities would solely be guided by their moral dictum, ethics and juristic sense. During 1999 Indian Parliament election, Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill, while answering a question by the India Today editor about the commission's stance in applying the code of conduct that primarily targeted the party in power, said, "Since the party in power is also the party seeking to return to power, it is necessary to ensure that it does not use official resources to come back to power. That destroys the level playing field."

Chief Election Commissioner M. A. Aziz, since his appointment, has attracted controversy. He shook up the country by taking a unilateral decision of preparing fresh voter list overriding the opinion of two commissioners who thought, as people do, that updating the voter list would conform to constitutional provision. How could the CEC take such a costly venture that involved 146 crore taka at the beginning just in printing forms, manuals and paying the allowances to the enumerators, mostly recruited from ruling party cadres, as media reports indicated. And the job they did was mostly an eye wash and messy because, as reports collected from several sources indicate, the forms they distributed were not taken back. In a cash-starved country that battles poverty, illiteracy, disease and unemployment day in and day out, should we have to believe that CEC's policies and decisions are driven by the imperatives of the incumbent government? Undeniably true, as CEC, in such a critical moment of nation's history, he has the toughest job as much as he has an unenviable job of keeping the people and the government happy. Doubtless, it is an enormously difficult but the most vital job. As an architect of new dream and clean ideas in presenting a free, fair and peaceful election, CEC M.A. Aziz could have transformed the moribund EC organisation into a dynamic institution that could deliver. But with his inept handling of the EC affairs from the beginning all such hopes seem doomed to failure.

With the EC virtually in limbo and presumably taking briefs from the PMO, never before a structural change that will make the EC truly independent and neutral was felt so intensely as now.

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The imperial succession debate taking a new turn

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

The fact that no male child has been born to the Japanese imperial family for about 40 years is no secret in Japan, nevertheless the issue has never stirred a nationwide debate of so much intensity as is being seen now. The last male child in the imperial family is Prince Fumihito, the second son of Emperor Akihito, who is now father of two daughters and expecting a third child. The news of pregnancy has somehow tamed the proponents of a proposed legal change in the imperial house law, and they have now decided that it would better to wait for deciding the next move until the arrival of the child. The proposed amendment was initiated to allow female succession to the throne and thus preserving the lineage of inheritance in the imperial family.

Japan's imperial family and its official caretaker body, the secretive and conservative Imperial Household Agency, for quite some time were not bothered with the problem of the absence of a male child, as throughout the late 1980s finding a suitable bride for the crown prince turned out to be a big obstacle to overcome. The emergence of Princess Masako, who had earlier been seen by many in Japan as the perfect match for the young crown prince, provided the Imperial Household Agency a temporary relief, just to be overtaken later by ever spreading rumours about her ability to fit into a regal life of the royals, as well as the couple's inability in giving birth to a child, who, in case of a male, will be the next heir to the throne after the crown prince. A prolonged waiting followed by a much publicized miscarriage of Princess Masako's eventually resulted in a happy ending through the arrival of Princess Aiko.

But this retrieve, too, later turned out to be a short-lived as rumours again began to fly all around concerning Princess Masako's physical and mental condition. It is true that in recent years she was rarely seen in public appearances. As the Japanese were increasingly being overtaken by gossip and guessing surrounding the imperial family, a group of country's main ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) stalwarts, headed by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, all of a sudden launched a campaign to amend the succession law of the imperial family with the ultimate aim of allowing a female heir to inherit the 2,500-year old throne. Their obvious intention, no doubt, was to pave the way for little Princess Aiko to become the first female successor to the imperial throne in modern Japan.

But the move eventually unfolded many new questions than the clear

CLOSEUP JAPAN

In an interview that Prince Tomohito gave to a monthly magazine early this year, he commented that the imperial lineage is precious because it has been passed through the male bloodline, uninterrupted, since the first Emperor Jinmu. Those who suspect that the comment made by Prince Tomohito is not an isolated act of an aging imperial family member, see in such call a calculated move by Japan's right wing nationalistic forces that are so keen on restoring what they presume as country's past glory.

answers it was supposed to provide to already existing ones. It also created a new division within the main ruling party, as more and more lawmakers started questioning the rationality of hastily amending the law. Some of them even made remarks that can easily be termed as politically incorrect, as their comments were heavily tainted with racially biased doses like the possibility of the offspring of blue eyed foreigners getting hold of the treasure throne. But the prime minister until very recently was giving clear hint of his firm standing, as the panel appointed by him was working on the mechanism of the proposed changes in the law. Koizumi also hinted that he was ready to submit a bill at the current session of the parliament paving the way for the female succession.

In its final report on the issue of imperial succession, the governmental panel recommended that women and their descendants be allowed to ascend the Chrysanthemum throne. The panel also said that the first order of succession should be given to the Emperor's firstborn child regardless of gender. At a quick glance the recommendations made by the panel might sound perfectly in line with the demands of the time. As there is a growing call from different quarters to ensure gender equality in each and every field of the society, it is quite natural that the imperial family too should come under the same gender equality agenda set to address such calls.

But as Japan's imperial system follows a long tradition linked closely to the religious rituals of Shinto, various groups that are keen in preserving the traditional way of life associated with imperial matters wasted no time to launch their counter-offensive to thwart and derail any such move. Most vocal among the critics of the proposed amendment is Prince Tomohito, a cousin of the emperor and one of the distant



Prince Tomohito: Most vocal among the critics

officially recognized heirs in the line of successors to the throne. It is interesting to look at the age groups of various imperial family members who are presently considered heir to the throne. The first in line is obviously the Crown Prince followed by his brother, Prince Fumihito. The close knit family members who are next in the line are either representatives of the older generation or those senior in age to the first two. As there is no male child in the imperial family under the age of forty, there is a real danger that serious problem might arise unless some sort of changes in the law is made in time. Both sides, as a result, are now calling for a change, but from the completely opposite positions they respectively hold.

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the male lineage by reinstating the status of former male members of the imperial branch families who lost their imperial ties after World War II. It should be noted that under a new system that came into existence following the adaptation of a new post war Japanese constitution, the branch families of the imperial household were no longer recognized as integrated parts of the family, and as a result family members were stripped of their titles and all financial and other benefits that they enjoyed during pre-World War II Japan. Prince Tomohito is now calling for the restoration of their lost position so that the offspring of such families can be considered as possible heirs of the throne. As a result, his comments stand straight to the opposite of what the governmental panel has recommended.

Those who suspect that the comment made by Prince Tomohito is not an isolated act of an aging imperial family member, see in such call a calculated move by Japan's right wing nationalistic forces that are so keen on restoring what they presume as country's past glory. The Sankei Shimbun, one of Japan's five prominent national dailies and an unofficial mouthpiece of the nationalist forces, also carried the interview and followed the subsequent debates it stirred. The groups were also busy lobbying ruling party Diet members asking them to refrain from supporting the proposed amendment and were successful in enlisting the support of a significant portion of LDP parliamentarians. At the beginning of February, 172 LDP lawmakers gathered at a meeting and declared their opposition to the hasty move that would allow female monarchs.

It was quite clear by the time that Koizumi was most likely heading towards another crisis within his party. But the subsequent announcement by the Imperial Household Agency of the pregnancy of Princess Koko, wife of Prince Fumihito, put water to this sparkling fire and even the Prime Minister is now saying that he was shifting his stance on passing the female emperor bill.

Princess Kiko is expecting a baby in autumn and it will be the couple's third child under two girls. Should the third child turn out to be a boy, the baby will be third in line of succession and first male heir from the generation after Crown Prince Naruhito and Prince Fumihito. As a result, the whole debate has now got a new dimension as concerned groups seem to have decided to wait and see if the expected baby turns out to be a boy. If not, then the controversy is bound to resurface as both the camps are certain to redraw their battle lines following their already declared positions.