

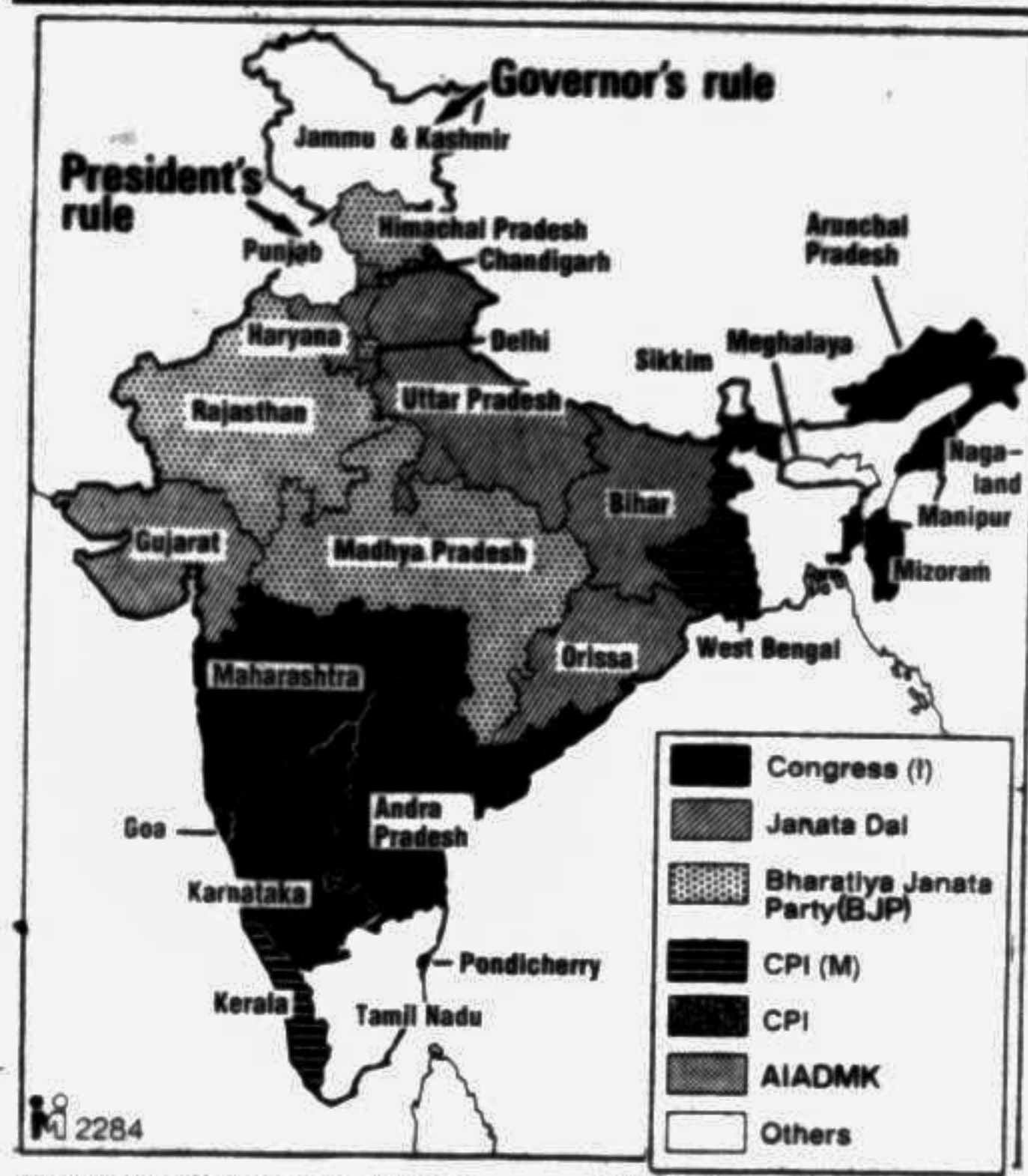
# INDIA GOES TO POLLS

## Uncertainties Overshadow Predictions

Chanchal Sarkar writes from New Delhi

Special to the Star

**Predictions can go awry. Journalists predict out of gut feeling ... and that predictions go like this: Congress will be the largest party, BJP will be the next, Janata Dal will be the third ...**



Rajiv Gandhi's style of functioning during 1984 to 1989 showed an immaturity sauced by gimmickry and cynicism that people began to distrust. His economic policy left the country bankrupt. Maybe he has learnt a bitter lesson. In the opposition, though, his brief foray into Gulf diplomacy was a success. His party can only gain in the North of India because in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh

and UP it made a very poor showing in 1990. It has no way to go but up. In the South Congress is popular and so is the personable Rajiv Gandhi. The BJP is an unknown material. Could this party's being in power have a negative effect on Bangladesh? Some BJP leaders have said they will try to stop the inflow of migrants from Bangladesh but have not spoken in religious terms. BJP governments have held office

in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh and the administrations were not notably communal. The BJP speaks with different voices. Though it has a cadreized Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as its muscle arm, how strong the RSS and VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) elements in it are, remain to be seen.

Mr V P Singh has nothing new to offer and people found his style of functioning as Prime Minister disappointing. He dithered and withered away all of his Prime Ministership. It is presumptuous to speak of what the Indian public wants but one should have a shot at making some rash remarks. India cannot afford frequent elections. They are vastly expensive both officially in what the state spends and unofficially even more in what the parties and candidates spend. Holders of 'No 2' money are the major contributors to election funds and they certainly expect a return for their investment.

The role of the media has changed enormously election by election. Doordarshan and AIR have stayed in their groove and so they are being passed with video and audio cassettes, some so emotive that they have been banned. Hoardings, posters, handbills, film advertisements, newspaper advertisements have drawn hundreds of crores of rupees and have meant a bonanza to printers and others. Of course every wall that can be defaced has been.

The author is a noted columnist and a former Assistant Editor of The Statesman and founder director of the Press Institute of India. He writes regularly for several Indian and foreign newspapers, including The Daily Star.

### A New Era for Nepal

The well-deserved victory won by the Nepali Congress Party in the first ever free and fair democratic election held in the country in more than three decades virtually completes the process of the return of the Himalayan kingdom to the multi-party parliamentary system that, at long last, effectively buries the out-dated partyless Panchayat structure. That it took so long for the people of Nepal to restore democracy to their land-locked country is sad but not surprising. After all, two other South Asian countries—Pakistan and Bangladesh—have also taken years to shake off the shackles of authoritarianism and to begin the journey back to democracy. This gives people of this country a special reason to rejoice at the historic development in Nepal. Here, one should not also overlook the fact that the mass upsurge in Nepal and Bangladesh which brought about the collapse of the system in the two countries coincided in time frames, thus putting their shared commitment to democracy into a new focus. Let us hope that our shared commitment to democracy, now being put to tests in Dhaka and Kathmandu, will further strengthen the close relationship between the two countries.

Besides shared commitments, there are almost identical challenges facing the two neighbours. Like Bangladesh, Nepal must demonstrate that the new democratic system works, and works better than authoritarianism, not merely in establishing the right political climate but also in stimulating the economy in fighting corruption and in restoring to full health such institutions as the judiciary, the media and the civil service. We have no doubt that as the new elected Government of Nepal strives towards these objectives, it can count on the support of the international community for its economic programme as well as on unqualified understanding, political and economic, of two of its immediate neighbours, India and China. There should also be no questions asked about the role of the King Birendra in this scenario. It should continue to be one of understanding and non-interference, as befitting a twentieth century constitutional monarch.

A major challenge facing the new administration in Nepal lies somewhere else. It is within the new parliament, more specifically, in the emergence of the United Communist Party of Nepal as the second largest block, with 68 seats, occupying the opposition bench. For Nepal, there is nothing to be alarmed by this development. However, much depends on how sharp is the polarisation at the policy level between the centre-right Congress Party and the leftist opposition. In order to reach a modus operandi within the framework of parliamentary democracy, the communists should abide by the constitution like any other party and refrain from rocking the boat, especially where the position of the figurehead monarch is concerned. On the other hand, the ruling party must acknowledge the popular mandate behind the communist's performance at the polls. This mandate is based on a programme for long overdue socio-economic reforms, especially in the land tenure system, taxation structure and basic rural development. The leftist opposition will indeed render a service to Nepal if it can push the ruling party on the road to reforms and thus help the country to embark on a modernisation programme in all different fields. In the final analysis, this will be the test for democracy in Nepal.

### The Campus, Again

The Dhaka University campus is blowing hot and cold once again. Several days of clashes between rival groups involving firearms have left the highest seat of education in the country feeling tense and apprehensive. The trouble this time apparently was triggered by a seemingly minor incident involving supporters of the two major student-political parties of the country. Why such minor incidents should lead to widespread violence is a mystery, and it is an extremely unhealthy indication of existing state of affairs, made deadly by the prevalence of firearms in student politics. The failure of the police to intervene during the clashes, despite a heavy presence, is another of those questions that begs a satisfactory answer.

Despite all that, there is hope behind the gloom. The All-Party Students Unity (APSU) announced on Saturday, following a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor and provosts of all the halls of residence, that they would work to eradicate all weapons of terror as well as terrorism from the campus. More important perhaps, APSU has made it clear it will demand the expulsion of weapon-carrying activists from all student parties.

As we have emphasised in a previous editorial on the issue, people do expect better things from the university now that the root cause of tension i.e. lack of government accountability and democracy, has more or less gone. Understandably, many people who hailed APSU and its components for their exemplary role in last year's pro-democracy movement are disappointed with continued violence in and around the campus. The simple fact is, if we wish to free our educational institutions from terror, then the students must show the way. The nation joined hands with them last year, and it will do so again, but only if APSU shows it has the intention and the ability to compel its components to give up politics of terror (statements are of little use; APSU made a similar declaration few weeks back with no impact).

With elections to the Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) due on July 18, it is the duty of APSU to make sure that guns and goons are not used to gain control of the campus or halls during campaigning. We wish to see a congenial atmosphere prevail on the campus, one that is conducive to studies as well as peaceful politics. In order to achieve that goal, student parties must discontinue their practice of allowing outsiders—whether non-students or expelled former students—to conduct politics, often with the help of firearms, on the campus. The university authorities and APSU bear the major share of responsibility to ensure non-students are unable to take part in campus politics. We have heard all the statements, now it is to be hoped that APSU components will honour their pledge to drive out terror from the campus. It is well recognised that without full cooperation from all the parties, there is not much the authorities can do to ensure peace.

**P**SEPHOLOGISTS are people who study elections and attempt mathematical predictions. There aren't many of them in India but the very few there are now make good money doing public predictions for newspapers and magazines and private ones for political parties. Sometimes the private whisper leaks into the press. One of them gives the Congress Party an edge over all the others, almost near an absolute majority.

However, as the trends in the Nepal election show, predictions can go awry. Journalists predict out of gut feeling and elementary calculations and that predictions go like this: Congress will be the largest party, without an overall majority; BJP will be next with a considerable hike over its 86 in the last election; Janata Dal will be the third, with the Leftists and others bringing up the rear; the Janata Dal (S) of Mr Chandra Shekhar can only be a parasite, having to cling to some other party.

Quite a number of wise people have said that the day of single party governments is over in India and that future is with coalitions. This was said in the 60's, too, when, in a number of states like West Bengal and U.P. coalition governments took office, wrangled and bickered and then disappeared. Mr. V.P. Singh's government was not a coalition in the strict sense because the BJP and the Leftists supported it from outside. But it was a coalition of sorts. After the results and before a government is formed, there can be a lot of movement across party borders. In fact, between Congress, Janata Dal, Janata Dal (S) and a fair number of the BJP followers there are no ideological borders.

### Japan's Labour Market

## The LatAm Connection

Suvendrini Kakuchi writes from Tokyo

**Latin Americans of Japanese descent are benefiting from a law that emphasises blood links to the detriment of Asians seeking jobs in Japan's labour market. Latin American workers, having legal status, have an edge over their Bangladeshi or Philippine counterparts.**

Watanabe of the Kalaba No Kai, a group that helps illegal workers. The severe labour crunch in Japan's expanding economy has resulted in the influx of workers from Third World countries. Despite numbers that reach well over the official 120,000 illegal workers—mostly from Asia—living in Japan, the government has refused to change laws barring unskilled labour. Last June, the immigration office tightened controls on unskilled workers with no proper visas by introducing severe penalties for both workers and employers. This forced many Asians to opt for deportation or go underground. As a result many Japanese factories are now hiring Latin Americans of Japanese descent. "When I go back to Brazil, many poor people ask me to help them get jobs in Japan and I am ashamed to say only Japanese can go," said one Japanese Brazilian. According to the Ministry of Labour, there are 80,000 Japanese Latin Americans reg-

istered here but unofficial estimates say there are over 300,000 living in Japan. Most of them are from Brazil, which has the largest population of Japanese migrants who went of South America for better economic opportunities during the 1920's and 1930's. Others come from Peru, Venezuela and Argentina. Latin American workers, having legal status, have an edge over their Bangladeshi or Philippine counterparts. There are very few cases of Japanese Latin Americans being dragged into gang rings or women being forced to work as prostitutes like Asians, according to Mario Lima Brasil, who heads Catla, an active Latin American workers support committee. But, like Asian illegal workers, the Japanese Latin Americans form a permanent underclass in Japanese society doing factory or farm jobs shunned by wealthy Japanese. "I probably will settle here because there are no economic opportunities back home," said 32-year-old Paulo Tanaka who works for 12 hours a day in an auto parts plant and lives with his Brazilian wife and two children in a two-room apartment. "But I am not accepted here as a Japanese and will never be," he added. Local television reports have featured the lives of the new migrants, many of whom are in their twenties and thirties. They regularly send back to South America portions of their salaries for the support of extended families or for building luxury houses they hope to return to someday. Volunteer social workers working with Japanese South Americans say the biggest problems facing the settlers stem from adjustment difficulties. "They may look like

### OPINION

#### Adoption: A Social Problem

Western experts are opining that single women interested in adopting children should think very carefully before doing so. They are stressing this especially in case of those children the identity of whose fathers are unknown, meaning that the fathers have abandoned the mothers after the birth of the child, and thus mothers being absolutely helpless have given the child for adoption. These helpless mothers take this decision thinking of the welfare of the child. They want their children to have a better life as well as a stable future. Even in cases where such a child is given for adoption to a family of only husband and wife, there also arises a problem. The main area of problem is that the adopted child is always trying to find who his/her real father is. This actually is nothing but a quest for finding their own identity but the result is that these children become extremely confused, and unhappy. It matters little even if they live a luxurious life while their anonymous past continues to haunt them. So gradually as they grow, and from childhood enter into adolescence, it becomes terribly important for them to know who they are. In other words, to find their roots, and it is this complicated question which keeps on bothering them, till they are able to find an answer. In cases they do not find the answer, they keep on searching for their past, making their present miserable. Often it so happens that these children, so determined to know about their identity, even go as far as hiring detectives to do this job for them. All this explains how deep the urge is within them, and how painful it is for them to realise that the present home of theirs is nothing but a 'house of cards'. This 'urge' is often successful in destroying the whole family life. Those who suffer most from this dilemma and subsequent unhappiness, are often ob-

### To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

#### Trial of Ershad

Sir, We want that H.M. Ershad should be tried in ordinary civil courts for his usurpation of power on March 24, 1982 from a legally constituted government of Justice Sattar. We want this trial in the name of democracy, rule of law and sovereignty of the people and to establish that crime does not pay. We also want that Ershad should get a fair trial, a fair trial so that posterity should not blame us for miscarriage of justice.

Farihana, Fazle Rabbi, Winyy 481, Ibrahimpur, Dhaka.

#### To err is human

Sir, A recent news item says that Her Royal Highness, the Queen of England, was spotted driving a car in Windsor area in England. The security guard got the shock of his life when he tried to stop the car, driven by the Queen herself, in the horse trials, which was closed to people without proper pass. Actually, when he stopped the car, the guard thought he had stopped an unauthorised woman driver from driving into a restricted area. When the guard realised whom he had checked, he was extremely embarrassed and scared. Well, to err is human, but

#### Vehicle luxury

Sir, Bangladesh is a poor country. It has been rendered poorer by the devastating tidal bore that swept through the coastal belt. It pains me to see luxury exhibited at this time by richer section of the society when I see them in the air-conditioned comfort of their huge Nissan Patrol or Mitsubishi Pajero. The government rules make it easy for them to do without paying for it. Mercedes Benz 560 SEL is considered a luxury in any society. In Bangladesh one has to pay over Tk 1 crore to have the pleasure of owning it. There is another vehicle Nissan Patrol which has almost all the luxuries of Mercedes and which costs almost same as Mercedes in many countries including the oil rich Gulf states. Incidentally, these luxury vehicle sells at only Tk 14 lac in Bangladesh due to some loop hole in our custom duty procedure.

In order to help get 4-wheel drive working vehicle for field work, government

#### Respect to dead bodies

Sir, Medical Students have strict instructions to pay proper respect to dead bodies, while taking lessons in anatomy classes, according to medical ethics.

Two photographs of (1) Mother and baby and (2) a woman, projected in the very front page of a widely circulated Bengali daily on May 04, 1991 far from eliciting an artistic laurel for the photographer, call for his drastic condemnation.

We do not know, if there exists any code of ethics for journalists—photographers included.

Bangladesh Press Institute should take the matter up suo-moto.

M.S. Haque, Dhaka.

#### BMDC affairs

Sir, When the whole nation is observing austerity vis-a-vis the cyclonic catastrophe and practically half of the population is suffering from hunger, lack of shelter and clothing etc., the BMDC authorities are setting a different example. A crash programme to beautify the centre has been taken up which for obvious reasons, has created dissatisfaction among the officers and employees. BMDC reportedly suffer a severe shortage of funds. It may be noted here that the PABX telephone system of the centre has been lying inoperative since the connection was cut off for non-payment of bills six months ago. The affairs of BMDC require a thorough investigation with honest, sincerity of purpose and patriotic feelings. An ex-participant