

Dhaka, Thursday, June 13, 1991

Hindu Right Wanes as India Goes Again to Polls

D. K. Joshi writes from New Delhi

After one day more of voting (June 15) the result of the delayed Indian general election will become known on June 18. The first days of voting were held just before Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. The effect of his death may be considerable. For one thing, the Hindu right seems to have lost some ground. And the election of scholarly Narasimha Rao as Party President has steadied Congress.

swing will carry it to the winning post. In their anxiety to thwart any swing to the right by Congress, leaders of the Communist Party (Marxist) openly sent out feelers to Rao. The Congress left doubted the desirability of any coming together before polling ended on June 15 and the Marxist CP leaders retraced their steps. Rao said "existing alliances cannot be jettisoned when the election process is on."



NARASIMHA RAO
New President of the Indian National Congress

June 15 and the Marxist CP leaders retraced their steps. Rao said "existing alliances cannot be jettisoned when the election process is on." If Congress without Gandhi was on its own seeking communist support on the basis of a left-oriented programme it is because ideology alone can be a substitute for charisma. Rao says Congress will adhere to the Nehru line, because there is no other viable line "outside the pale of fascism."

Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu — are not expected to do well in the election and will lose their national political clout. BJP is in panic. It may be badly mauled in the second and third phase of polling. The emotional issue of the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya no longer rouses Hindu emotions.

now play an important role in rebuilding Congress. In the new collective leadership the regional party leaders can deliver the goods. Rao, the mild-mannered, non-combative 70-year-old realist, has the initial advantage.

A Venice of Short Spells

Rainfall used to be measured in inches before the metric revolution. God knows why our weather managers now measure rainfall in millimetres — may be in order to be precise and to keep close to international practices. Our experiences of late as residents of the noble and medieval city of Dhaka compels us to suggest that volume of water pouring down a leaking sky be rather measured in feet and meters.

This we suggest as we feel baffled to explain a two-hour shower — slightly heavier than a drizzle — drowning half of the city in 30 centimetres of water on the average. Work it out for yourself — dear reader — what figure we shall arrive at of the shower for the whole long day. Sometime this week the rainy season will be officially on with the advent of Ashadh. After that there will be more than one spell of rain continuing for days on end. The feats of water-logging that our dear metropolis has already displayed, have albeit causing widespread dislocation of life — also brought along a sense of change leaning on the festive holiday-type ambience. But those unrelenting spells of rain will be something quite different — a veritable nightmare will come strangulating a day-time city.

We have already tried to make some pointers to the causes of the capital city's problem of inundation without there being any question of a flood anywhere. They are well-known and understood and accepted as standard causes which should be remedied as soon as possible. A process should already have started to increase in the city both ponds and tanks or big dug-out water reservoirs on the one hand and a network of canals working both as inlets and outlets of the excess water that comes with a heavy shower. But we have yet to have a sign of any move towards that.

A suspicion is creeping universally into the apprehensive minds of the city's populace. Indeed many have already started believing that the sudden aggravation of the city's water-logging problem has something to do with the Dhaka protection embankment — embarked on in a flash of maybe thoughtless eagerness to pull off something spectacular by the last discredited regime. If the embankment, in its present incomplete shape, is indeed in any way contributing to the water-logging problem — it is time that a proper reassessment was made and the members of the public be told of the result and all fears set aside by action mounted to right the wrong.

In the mean time the WASA chairman has gone on Press with some heart-warming bits of reassuring information. He has said of a Tk10 crore crash programme to get Dhaka out of its bogging problems in six months—we say, hopefully. The outline of the plan is spotlessly pious—about 20 kilometres of network of magnesium-dia pipes to flush the excess water out and re-exavation of 13 canals. Both the money earmarked and timeframe fixed appear to leave much room for scepticism. And then the problem areas the chairman has enumerated don't include the sea that rises on the T where Road 27 meets the all important Mirpur Road. There can as such be other areas that have been overlooked.

The factors blamed by him for the routine inundation of the city don't speak a world on the protection embankment. And we also note that he has however failed to name the major culprits, namely, inadequate drainage lines, blocking of canals, unplanned town development and lack of co-ordination among different government agencies.

How we wish the WASA chairman's optimism to pay dividend. We have a hunch much more than as outlined by him will be needed to be done to solve the problem.

A Welcome US Move

The United States has re-affirmed its decision to cut-off military aid to Pakistan unless and until the latter proves it does not possess, nor is it in the process of acquiring, nuclear weapons. Economic and military aid worth US \$ 573 million was cut-off on October 1, 1990, following President George Bush's failure to certify to Congress that Pakistan did not possess nuclear arms.

The welcome US announcement, made on Monday, comes as a further proof that Washington intends to seriously pursue its policy of discouraging proliferation of nuclear arms in the developing world, particularly in regions with potential for serious military confrontations.

The announcement follows a move by Pakistan widely seen as an attempt to placate the United States namely Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's call on June 6 for an international conference on nuclear non-proliferation in South Asia. The move suffered a set-back when India dismissed it as "a propaganda play."

Pakistan will no doubt feel aggrieved at continuing US insistence on tying aid to the nuclear issue. But that should not distract from the essential commonsense of the US decision. It is quite reassuring to know that despite other pressing problems, the US has not allowed its attention to be diverted from this issue of serious long-term implications.

There is good reason to believe that Pakistan's foreign and defence policies are still dictated by the military and not the elected government; furthermore, a nuclearised Pakistan is likely to cause further destabilisation in an already volatile region, increasing the possibility of conflict. Therefore, it is vital that Islamabad be persuaded or even pressured into not proceeding any further with its nuclear ambition.

For its part, Pakistan cannot claim that the US is oblivious to its security needs, since Washington is primarily responsible for the current strength of Pakistan's conventional forces. What Islamabad should also remember is that the nuclear option is not the only answer when it comes to security vis-a-vis India. Though Pakistan has a legitimate right to be worried about India's nuclear capabilities, acquisition of nuclear weapon will only further impoverish its economy and contribute to regional instability and insecurity.

Lack of a towering personality has driven the 106-year-old Congress towards collective leadership and inner-party democracy. At his first press conference, Rao said that once the party had held organisational elections it would be cleansed of what Gandhi used to call the "brokers of power and influence."

The BJP's abnormal growth has made other secular and parties of the left look at Congress with a friendly eye. They agree with Rao that the BJP wants "the destruction of the system."

Gandhi's death has also generated new sympathy for the party, particularly among women, and even a marginal

Shifts in Moscow-Tokyo Relations help Ease Impasse

by Ehsanul Haque

RELATIONS between the Soviet Union and Japan have been smouldering since the end of the World War II. Their bitterness with each other only added barriers to their normalization process. But in the present changing scenario of world politics, both the powers have realized the need to remove the alienating forces between them in order to contribute to the peace process as well as to serve their mutual interests.

Territorial Dispute: Among the several issues that may have strained Japan's ties with the Soviet Union in the last forty-six years, the dispute over the ownership of the four islands stands out as the sore thumb. The islands, known in Japan as the Northern Territories and in the Soviet Union as the Kuriles, are Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and Habomai.

In the late 19th century, Japanese fishermen occupied the islands. The island, running north-east from Hokkaido to the Soviet peninsula of Kamchatka, command good fishing grounds and rich mineral deposits. In February, 1945 at the Yalta Conference, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin agreed that the Soviet Union would join the war against Japan and receive the Kuriles and the southern part of Sakhalin as war booty. The Soviet Union seized the islands in September, 1945 after Japan's surrender in World War II. About 16,000 Japanese residents were driven off and 50,000 Soviets now live there including thousands of Red Army soldiers.

The 1956 Soviet Offer: Japan abandoned its claim to the Kuriles under the 1951 US-Japan Mutual Security and Cooperation Treaty. As a result of discussion, in 1956 Moscow agreed to return Tokyo the smaller islands, Habomai and Shikotan. The offer was the subject of intense Japanese political factionalism. Some wanted to accept it. Others wanted all four claimed islands or at least a Soviet commitment that they would be returned. Washington favoured the latter headline with the

then Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, evidently threatening to keep Japan's Okinawa island in perpetuity if Tokyo accepted Moscow's offer. However, the offer was called off subsequently by Moscow as the US and Japan renewed their security treaty in 1960. Between that time and almost till the advent of the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Moscow rarely acknowledged the existence of a territorial dispute between the two countries. Moreover, the Soviets viewed Japan as part of the Pacific alliance assembled against them under the US leadership, while the Japanese considered the Soviet Union as a military threat.

Change in Moscow's Policy: An effective entry into the Asia-Pacific Region (APR) has been a goal of Gorbachev ever since he came to power. The vital importance of the APR to the Soviets is based on their assessment that: (1) Japan is one of the important 'centres' of the contemporary international system capable of challenging United States' economic dominance; (2) the Soviet Far East which is rich with natural resources would benefit from investment and financial aid which can come from the APR countries; (3) the Soviet Union has in the past been isolated from the APR because of its earlier paranoia of the US-Japan security treaty; (4) Moscow has much to gain from alliances with the newly industrialized countries of Southeast Asia and with Australia and New Zealand; and (5) its entry into the APR would be an attempt by the Soviet Union to penetrate a regional alliance in what they consider to be the fastest developing area in the world.

Normalization Attempt: Soviet President Gorbachev's recent visit to Tokyo (April 16-19, 1991) was aimed at burying mutual animosity and thereby opening the way for their interaction. He was the first Soviet leader ever to visit Japan. Before his visit, Gorbachev tried to earn the favour of Japan by paying a visit to the Soviet Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk to pay respects at the graves of those Japanese soldiers who died during the period of detention in Siberia.

It is estimated that of the .6 million Japanese soldiers who spent nearly 11 years in captivity, more than 60,000 had died. The treatment of the prisoners of war had been one of the points of friction-between Moscow and Tokyo. Gorbachev direfully needed a successful visit for at least three reasons: (1) to harness a huge sum of financial aid from Japan to prop up the Soviet Union's floundering economy; (2) to restore his reputation as a statesman; and (3) to give him a breathing space at home to tackle strikes, protests, and calls from communist hardliners and radicals for him to resign.

Japanese Offer: In order to retain the four islands, Japan made lucrative offers to the Soviet Union which were desperately needed by the latter. Tokyo offered Moscow a deal worth \$ 26 billion, almost double its contribution to the Gulf war effort, in soft loans and hard cash, for the return of the islands. To make the offer palatable, it proposed to accept two now (according to the 1956-Soviet offer) and the other two later. The exchange would be spread over five years. But previously Japan had demanded that all four be handed over together. The latest Japanese move reveals that it now prefers to follow the path of patience while dealing with this dispute. Besides, the Japan National Oil Corporation agreed to develop natural gas fields in Sakhalin. Japan also offered money and technology to assist the Soviet Union convert some of its weapons plants to civilian use. The Export-Import Bank of Japan wished to provide a \$ 450 million so that the Soviet Union can pay its arrears to Japanese trading companies. Japan also released \$ 100 million in emergency food aid grant to Moscow.

Soviet Obligations: Soviet reluctance in giving up the islands should be analyzed in view of its domestic and international position. From long Soviet experience, the basic fear is simple: to give an inch would have resulted in the Japanese immediately demanding a mile. As the domestic adversaries criticize

Kuriles; and setting up joint ventures in oil and automobile manufacture.

Japanese Stance: Japan's stance over the islands dispute has been that it would not provide the Soviet Union with the much-needed financial aid until the four islands are returned. For Japan, their return is a matter of national pride. Since 1981, the Japanese government has been organizing rallies on every 7th February, calling the day "Northern Territories Day" to raise public awareness of the issue. Besides, Japan has taken active interest in the 2-3 million KW nuclear power plant on one of the Kurile islands. This interest is probably due to the fact that the government is finding it increasingly difficult to build new nuclear plants in Japan in view of growing popular opposition.

Security Issue: During the summit, Gorbachev had three specific suggestions designed to end the cold war in Asia: (1) a five-nation conference about security problems, to be attended by China, India, US, Japan, and the Soviet Union; (2) a broader meeting of the Asia-Pacific nations in 1993; and (3) three-way consultations between the Soviet Union, US, and Japan. But the policy makers in Tokyo argue that weapons reduction by

Moscow has not been as appreciable as it has been on the European front with some in Japan ever accusing the Soviet Union of moving thousands of weapons to the Asian theatre to "escape" the provisions of the treaty governing conventional forces in Europe. Kaifu rebuffed the idea as no new regional initiative was really necessary at a time when there were several regional disputes including Japan's own territorial problem.

Final Comment: Whatever may be the outcome of the summit, at least the developments in Soviet-Japanese relations would help ease the diplomatic impasse that has soured their relations. For Gorbachev, the visit seems to have been more a reconnaissance trip than a deal-making one. For their part, Japan got the opportunity to emerge from the US security umbrella and establish a more mature, multi-polar relationship with the outside world. However, as the recent summit marked the trend of rapprochement, there is optimism that at the next round of summit sometime this year, Moscow and Tokyo would reap something tangible.

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OPINION

War Reparation : Iraq's Obligation

Muslehuddin Ahmad in his article in your newspaper on June 10, has brought up the question of war reparations to be paid by Iraq. He argues that the UN Resolution 687 will punish "Iraqi people and indeed punish them unjustly." But what alternative is there?

Throughout the history of nations, aggressors have had to pay the price when they turn out to be the losers in a war. Both Germany and Japan duly paid their war reparations — it was only recently that East Germany had to complete payments to the Jews for the holocaust inflicted on them — though money alone can never raise the dead or compensate for the enormous sufferings of innocent victims. It is undoubtedly a pity that the Iraqi people have also to be involved in this exercise, but what other method is there to the vital issue of war reparations?

M. Ahmad is simplistic in suggesting that "defeat itself is a punishment." Yes, indeed, but this is surely cold comfort at best to the Kuwaitis who have suffered monumental losses, not to mention the workers of the Third World countries who have seen their life savings disappear into clouds of dust in the barren desert. And are our memories so short that we have forgotten the immense sufferings of the refugees in the blistering heat of the camps — those who were trapped in the "wrong place at the wrong time" — just before the outbreak of the Gulf War?

The Iraqi people as a whole has to pay because it is impossible to separate the people from the State. After all, if push come to shove, they could have risen up against Saddam Hussein and stopped the senseless aggression. If Iraq, as a nation, does not pay, who else does M. Ahmad

think, is going to foot the bill for the huge losses suffered by Kuwait, workers of the Third World countries, as well as other countries like Turkey and Egypt? The World Bank? The International community of peace-loving states? Let us not forget that Iraq plundered and cleaned up the bank vaults of Kuwait as well as whatever hardware they could lay their hands on, and even traffic lights were not spared!

The United Nations was in the picture right from the beginning of the Gulf crisis, starting with Perez de Cuellar's efforts for a negotiated settlement and during the process of sanctioning the blockade. So it makes a lot of sense to give the Allied demands a global character by involving the world body, the Security Council being a forum for all shades of opinion. Even then, the 30 percent that the Security Council has suggested is far too low a figure, the Allies have asked for 50 percent of the total Iraqi oil export earnings, which, to right-thinking people, would constitute a fair and realistic figure.

To most peace-loving people, war reparations is a must. Otherwise any tin-pot dictator will go on the rampage — thinking he can get away with it; if defeat is all that he has to face!

While M. Ahmad earnestly pleads the Iraqi case, the very same country has not learnt anything from its recent disastrous venture. Nor has it learnt that war does not pay. Witness the ruthless bashing the Kurds received immediately after the ceasefire — and now reports have it that the Iraqi Government is busily harassing the Shias.

Nancy Wong
Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Solar energy

Sir, After every cyclone and natural calamity people living in affected areas of the country are left stranded without power supply for light and running refrigeration units in dispensaries for preservation of life-saving drugs and vaccines etc.

We often come across of seminars and symposiums held by various government and other organisations on scientific matters, which includes solar energy. But it is regretted, application of solar energy for availing its reported benefits are hardly evident or reported or publicised. We understand that in our neighbouring countries utilisation of solar energy is increasing to bring benefits to their citizens.

Although solar energy has been tried and accepted elsewhere for its benefits our seminars and symposiums still appear to be of academic interest only. By bringing light to homes in non-grid electric supply regions the students can study, women can do house work and men can in-

dulge in vocational work for additional hours after sunset. With nearly 70% of our 68,000 villages remaining outside grid-power supply we urge the highest level of our various decision-making government organisations to seek available ready-information from neighbouring and other countries on utilisation of solar energy for generating electric power to speedily contribute to the welfare of our people.

Rafique Tito
Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka.

No complacency, please

Sir, The present government has come into power by the active and massive support—cum—sacrifices of millions of 'sons of the soil', some of whom will never be back again amongst us. As a political party BNP itself fought very hard and suffered simultaneously, side by side with the innocent public who wanted a total change from autocracy to

democracy.

Now with the popular government coming into power and the sudden cyclone and tidal surge causing us a massive devastation the enthusiasm must not cease. I request, rather fervently appeal to the entire government machinery to wake up like a rock and get cemented to tackle all problems prioritewise which are eating into the vital of this nation and also to remain on total guard against any possible threat of conspiracy. To protect and raise the standard of efficiency of administration to an acceptable standard befitting a respectable nation of 110 million, let there be no complacency creeping into our thought or action whatsoever.

Anouar-ul Moshin
Jigatola, Dhaka.

Low life expectancy

Sir, A recent press release of the United Nations Information Centre in Dhaka says that the average expectancy of life has increased

in recent years in Bangladesh, during the period of 1960 to 1990.

But even with this increase, it is much lower than that in the average developing countries.

With all the effort we are still ten years lower in average life expectancy compared to the other developing countries of the world.

The reason stated is the growing rate of population in countries like Nepal and Bangladesh.

Therefore, it is a warning for us, and a very serious one. A large number of problems in our country are the result of over-population. So unless this is contained, there is little chance that other problems are getting solved. And as days go by our already over-burdened economy will become more and more pressurised with the GNP becoming lower and lower.

Thus our priority number one is making the family planning programme a success.

R. Ahmed
Gopibagh, Dhaka.