

BJP's Appeal on the Wane

Belying all calculations and predictions, the results in the just concluded crucial election in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state with an electorate of 140 million, seem to be signalling a positive turn for the world's largest democracy. In the four states where polls were held after the state governments had been dismissed by the country's Prime Minister Narasimha Rao following the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 by the extremist Hindu groups, the fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has lost some of its ground. It has retained its hold on the state of Rajasthan, but lost to the Congress (I) in Himachal Pradesh and consolidated its position in Delhi where the election has been held for the first time after the elevation of its status as a union territory.

On the other hand, the Congress has improved upon its poor showing in the last election but still has not gained enough to celebrate. Only in Himachal Pradesh has it regained control but in the all-important state of Uttar Pradesh it is hovering on a distant third position. Particularly, its defeat to the BJP in Delhi will really hurt. Results of Madhya Pradesh, which are yet to come, will now have a bearing on the leadership of Narasimha Rao, if not on the Indian politics on the basis of religious fundamentalism or secularism. If this most important question is going to be resolved at all by the outcome of elections anywhere in India, it surely is Uttar Pradesh.

On this count perhaps the big loser in this election has been the politics of religion. In the political scrambles on both sides of the religious divide, even the greatest optimist could not hope for anything positive for India to happen. But fortunately, from the ruins of Uttar Pradesh, a new secular force is emerging in that the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party have come on top. The alliance of Mulaem Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party and Kashi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party represent the down-trodden, lower Hindu castes and minority Muslims — who combine to make up the majority of the Indian population.

Hopefully, the reversal of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh can be a turning point — signalling that BJP's popularity, that drew its strength from Hindu revivalist passion, is on the wane. That the voters have also made no concession to the Congress (I) is a manifestation of the most tested party's failure to make the right appeal to the majority of the Indian electorate. Instead the message is taking a concrete shape suited to the needs of a modern secular India. Mulaem Singh Yadav, himself hailing from a low caste, has been able to respond to the new reality and his political partner Kashi Ram has also risen up to the occasion, going beyond the religious barrier.

Indeed, the setback for the BJP, the Congress (I) and the emergence of a more down-to-earth force in the Hindi belt can have far-reaching impacts on the polity of entire India. The threat posed by the communal politics has not totally disappeared but at least it has lessened to a substantial extent. Liberal and Secular political parties will have time to reflect on the positive developments set on course in the state where the devastating incendiary of communalism was ignited through the demolition of the Babri Mosque. The fact that the voters have turned their back to communal politics so soon is a proof that the common people had little or no part in the sacrilege committed on the mosque; it was the calculative notorious politicians who incited the Hindu zealots.

Let the secular and liberal spirit, therefore, hold and also let India come out of the chaos and confusion to live up to its democratic principles.

The Question of Trust

People in Britain trust their journalists as much as they do their ministers. There is no question, however, for this or that party to feel flattered — they are on the same boat their veracity being accepted by only 10 per cent of the British people. With 90 persons in a hundred not believing them, both ministers and journalists are nevertheless continuing with their vocations gloriously. What is then the value of people's faith in those that, theoretically at least, live and thrive on people's trust?

Howmuchsoever we may have pined for over a century for a life distinguished by security and stability, liberty and democracy based on universal education as the British way of life was always projected to us, we would cringe from trading our people's attitude towards ministers and journalists with that now obtaining in Fair Albion. How would a society tick on if its opinion-makers and motivators were not depended upon or its administration leaders did not enjoy a goodly following?

At the same time, however, we have avoided looking closely at how did these two denizens from the worlds of power and influence fare with our own people — perhaps for fear of something quite unpalatable turning up. Ministers have long been hand-picked men not really elected by anyone. But most ministers are now elected although it is difficult to guarantee that even the genuine votes they garnered anyway represented marks of trust. Once in office, the minister's constituency widens to include all of the nation not even one per cent of which knows anything about the minister, not to speak of resting their trust on him or her. Rather than building this thin thing up the ministers take extra pain to appear on the newspapers and the television pontificating on things not within their province. Irrelevant and excessive exposure on the print and the electronic media robs the ministers of the chance of ever being trusted in the future. If the British ministers can manage with 90 per cent of the people not believing them, ours can do even better by making do with virtually no one believing them. The moral is: People's trust and success as a minister are mutually exclusive categories confused only by the gullible as having inseparable relation.

Journalists represent no one. They are self-appointed — or better employer-appointed — keepers of the nation's conscience as well as its health. They need hardly to aspire for the trust of the people. All they need is to sell their journals. Even so a lot of people put their faith in what comes out in the morning press — a habit of believing everything that comes in print, old and hard to die.

The British people put their best trust, 85 per cent, in doctors and teachers. O, indeed they still live in the *satyayuga*. Our doctors and teachers have been by constant and unflagging endeavour, closing the gap between them and the businessmen and politicians. And forfeiting, as a price for an ostentatious way of life, people's trust. After all, people's trust cannot give anyone the things one hankers after these days. And loss of it amounts to little — materially.

DEFEAT is not a pleasant experience to recall. But were the nations to do so, they would probably become more resolute and gritty in their attitudes. India lost to China in November 1962. Had New Delhi revived in memory the humiliation of those days it would not have consecrated the status quo on its border with China, as Prime Minister Narasimha Rao did at Beijing two and a half months ago. This was in the face of the unanimous resolution Parliament passed that every inch of the 35,000 square-mile territory conquered by the Chinese would be recovered.

The status quo is a tempting option which most governments accept because it offers the least line of resistance. A soft state like India fell for it is not surprising. But the Chinese thought we were made of a sterner stuff. There estimate was that it would take India a year or two to develop the necessary capability to resume war.

This is what General Ayub Khan, then Pakistan's martial law administrator, has attributed in his personal diary to the Chinese ambassador. He came to inform him about Beijing's unilateral ceasefire on November 21, 1962, after the month-long war between India and China. Portions of the diary are now public in Pakistan. Ayub's own assessment was that it paid India to keep up tension with China "to induce western powers to give them military assistance."

Whether his remark was out of pique or not, the fact is that the list of armaments Jawaharlal Nehru, then India's prime minister, sent to John Kennedy, then the US President, was indeed long. So much so that B K Nehru, India's ambassador in Washington at that time, him-

Ayub's Diary on Indo-China War

The fear expressed by Ayub that "they (India) will use it (military strength) against smaller neighbour" if their tension with China is diminished might have been part of India bashing... It has some basis. All our neighbours are resentful towards us... There is no doubting that we have one yardstick to settle differences with a powerful country like China and another for our puny neighbours.

self felt embarrassed. He has been quoted as having said: "We had put India and its security at the mercy of Americans."

The Chinese assessment that India would hit back in "one or two years" was wrong. At no stage did Nehru or his successors contemplate any military action to retrieve the lost territory. Till his death in 1964, nearly two years after the ceasefire, Nehru was trying his best that China should accept the Colombo peace proposals, which allowed Beijing to retain most of the territory it had occupied.

Lal Bahadur Shastri, his successor, was at pains not to provoke China. He was worried over the Chinese ultimatum during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, that India should return some sheep and yaks which had strayed in to its territory. Mrs Indira Gandhi too pursued the same policy of peace and blessed the talks between officials of India and China to settle the border problem peacefully. She was worried how Beijing would react during the Bangladesh war in 1971 because Pakistan expected its intervention.

It was only in 1987 that General K Sundarji, then chief of the army staff, pushed forward India's line in the east and established a few posts in the disputed territory. But India's apology was pathetic when China said that probably New Delhi had forgotten the lesson it was taught in 1962. It was

explained at the highest level that Sundarji's move was "unauthorised". Therefore, the question of India reassembling its forces and attacking China never arose at any stage.

Our top brass were wrong in their appraisal. China had no plan to attack India if it did not want to restart the hostilities. Beijing had occupied what it had in its mind. If India had tried to take it back, the war would have followed. Had the military realised this it would

cult to maintain or insulate it. Ayub quotes the Chinese ambassador's remark: "The (Indian army) may be good ceremonial troops but had very little conception of modern mobile warfare." The dismal performance of the army in 1962 could not have left any other impression, although Ayub is correct in his remark that the Chinese ambassador was "very boastful" of the effectiveness of the Chinese troops. Ayub goes on to record in his

ident, Hare Krishna Mahatab, then deputy leader of the Congress parliamentary party, and Mahavir Tyagi, the government's main critic, amassed bushwood to put around the stake for Menon. Nehru, they argued, was misled or kept in the dark. Morarji Desai, a Congress stalwart, was openly critical of Nehru but he had no following in the party.

Menon was not willing to defend himself at the cost of Nehru. Many years later, I asked Menon why he had not told his side of the story. He said that were he to do so, he would have to put the blame on Nehru and he would not do that. I have also heard that there was a "conspiracy" to remove him. After he quit, the Chinese offered ceasefire.

Ayub also told the Chinese in 1962, as his diary reveals, "In future, I hope that before they take any precipitate steps (ceasefire was the one), they will consult us and we may be able to give them sound advice." Much water has flown down the Sind since. It is unlikely that Beijing told Islamabad beforehand about the "understanding" it reached with Narasimha Rao on the border. It may not be advantageous for India in the long run but it frees a substantial number of troops, which can be moved from the Chinese border to Pakistan's.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has pointed out in a recent press interview that the agreement had made it possible

for India to delink troops from the Chinese border. "So there is a formidable Indian armada (sic) which does pose to our security," Benazir has said.

The fear expressed by Ayub that "they (India) will use it (military strength) against smaller neighbour" if their tension with China is diminished might have been part of India bashing. But it has some basis. All our neighbours are resentful towards us. True, they exaggerate our faults and minimise their own failings. But there is no doubting that we have one yardstick to settle differences with a powerful country like China and another for our puny neighbours.

Leave Pakistan apart with which Kashmir is the stumbling block, we could have mended relations with Bangladesh and Nepal. Dhaka has raised the problem of water from the Ganges. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia made a reference to it at the UN assembly and she has threatened to formally approach the UN for intervention. Why New Delhi cannot revive the arrangement which the Janata government had accepted and which the Congress government refused to renew? India can fix a time limit of 10 years during which period Bangladesh must develop some alternative source.

The Nepalese parliament has blocked the approval of the water and power agreements that Narasimha Rao had signed with Prime Minister G P Koirala at Kathmandu. They have their usual suspicion of the big brother trying to exploit them. Some clarifications and assurances can probably save the agreements. But New Delhi is too officious, too demanding. And our foreign office has not forgotten to throw its weight around — a bane of problems with our neighbours.

preventing their flock from doing so. He said: "Let's call a spade a spade. We even have deaths among the clergy."

William Shullerberger, of Makerere University, says asking the Church to become more accommodating on condoms in morally deficient because it would mean that the Church adopts a social position that is at odds with the gospel.

Anglican Bishop Misaeri Kawuma understands the difficulties involved: "There is this struggle between the church and the medical profession and even secular society. Immorality should not be encouraged, but there is this reality."

"The Church cannot encourage ungodly morals, but if youth and those unmarried are so foolish — and I say so foolish — not to abstain, then the condom is not a solution to Aids, but could be an alternative."

The churches are increasingly accused of not showing enough compassion for those who suffer. A researcher at St John's mission, Kisenyi, a slum area near Kampala, asks why they adopt a callous attitude towards Aids sufferers at a time when they need love and encouragement.

He said that in six years no priest from the neighbouring diocese only three kilometres away had called on them. — Gemini News

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

not have kept thousands of soldiers perched on hills for 30 years. Imagine the money we would have saved and diverted towards development.

As a military expert, Ayub should have known that the Chinese ceased firing when they reached the foothills, near Tezpur, Assam. If they had advanced further, they would have faced stiff opposition because the Indian jawan is one of the best in the world on land. The area where the Chinese sliced through India's forces was hilly, to which they were not acclimatised. The story on land would not have been the same. Also, the Chinese line of supply was getting lengthier day by day; they would have found it diffi-

diary: "If you (the Chinese) had continued fighting with India for another week or so, I have no doubt in my mind that Nehru would have been ousted." This is not a correct estimate. There was no question of Nehru's removal. The Congress Party, which he headed, had an absolute majority in parliament; it knew no leader who could challenge him. He was too big for them.

Lal Bahadur Shastri, his successor, was his prodigy. Even at the time of worst reverses, his anger was against Krishna Menon, then Defence Minister, not Nehru. This was true of the Congress Party on the whole. Leaders like U N Dhebar, the party's former pres-

The Fight Against AIDS

Army of Orphans Poses New Problems

Today, December 1 is World AIDS Day. An estimated nine million people carry the HIV virus, says the World Health Organisation. Up to two million, most in the developing world, could die annually from AIDS for which, until now, no vaccine or cure has been found.

by Melvis Dzisah in Abidjan, Julius Kaliya in Lilongwe and Crespo Sebunya in Kampala

In Africa, a growing difficulty arising from AIDS is the army of orphans left behind. The deaths of so many young people also means increasing numbers of sick and elderly parents and relatives have to be cared for. The extended family system helps, but cannot cope. One estimate in Malawi is that by 1998 the number of orphans will have rise to 560,000.

The scale of the problem can be gauged from the fact that in 1985 Malawi reported only 17 AIDS cases. Eight years later it is estimated 300,000 have died. Aids Programme manager Dr George Liomba says at least five people are dying of Aids every hour.

For too long, it is now gener-

ally agreed, Malawians were prevented from talking freely about the subject.

In Uganda, one of the worst hit countries in Africa, it is still difficult to convince people to use condoms. One reason, says businessman Joseph Mukasa, is that it is highly risky to marriage. He explains: "If my wife

sees condoms, she will automatically believe that I'm unfaithful. It is a symbol of unfaithfulness."

It has been difficult for other reasons to persuade people to use condoms. In Kabarole district residents were annoyed when an expatriate firm, Myers International, imported millions of condoms there. People complained that they stood to be stigmatised.

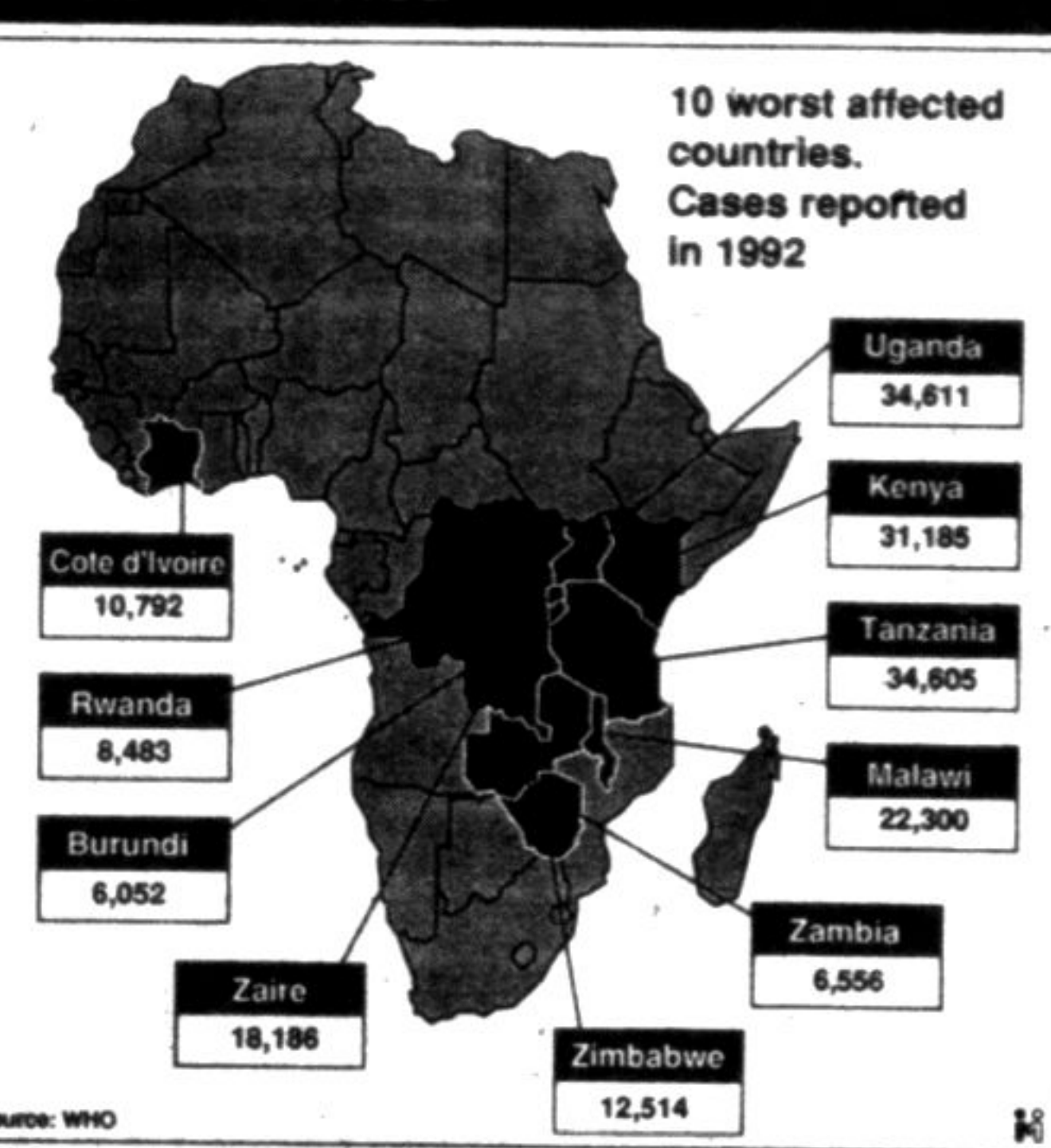
Condom information programmes also seem to act to the disadvantage of women. Mary Owor, manager of a school health project, said that in 83 per cent of schools visited, the students said they felt Aids was spread by women. This might be, she

said, because a condom was a protective device used by men who thought the advice was being given to them to protect themselves against infection.

Latest statistics in Uganda suggest 40,000 people are likely to die this year. The figures do frighten people, and after one recent big funeral in Soroti, northern Uganda, more than 3,000 condoms were sold when hundreds of people stayed overnight.

The Roman Catholic church is coming under increasing attack for preventing contraception. Aids counsellor Charles Tusubira accused the church of hypocrisy in that some priests used condoms themselves while

Aids in Africa



To the Editor...

Foreign tours

Sir, Once installed in office it becomes almost customary for most of the public leaders and high officials to make foreign tours.

We observe ministers and bureaucrats going to various foreign countries one after another and attending conferences and seminars. We wonder what for our Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials are posted in various capitals and cities in the world?

We would very much appreciate if the Ministry of Finance kindly let us know, for the sake of accountability and financial discipline, as to what amount of expenditure on foreign TA/DA has been incurred during the last year 1992-93 and what budgetary provision has been made on this account for the current financial year?

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Industry based on waste processing

Sir, Through your widely circulated newspaper I would like to draw the attention of the policy planners of Bangladesh specially those in the Ministry of Environment and Forests to the letter written by Mr Imtiaz Hossain in your paper on 23.11.93. As per the letter it seems that GOB has recently given permission to a foreign

investor to set up a plant near Mongla port which would process imported industrial wastes. I completely agree with Mr Hossain — "This speaks of our alarming lack of consciousness about environment pollution and hazards."

I strongly feel that there should be an official enquiry so as to find how this sinister idea got through concerned agencies of GOB. In any case, this has to be stopped and the permission cancelled, whatever may be the repercussions.

While the whole civilised society is crying foul about industrial wastes we intend to import these dangerous wastes in the name of industrialisation and employment generation! I feel that we should rather be less industrialized than initiate such a process of self-destruction and annihilation in our country. Does anyone know what are they going to do with the "wastes" of this waste consuming industry? Where are they going to dump these more hazardous secondary wastes? Do we have the right to expose our future generations to dangerous wastes which would continue to be health and environmental hazards for the whole nation?

At a time while we are banning the production of polythene shopping bags which no other country has done yet, this sanction of waste processing

industry seems rather shameful and sickening.

Dr Noorudding Ahmed
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Political intolerance

Sir, The prevailing unrest in the whole of the country speaks of a sort of political pollution that is getting more dusty day by day. Every political party is trying to show its patriotic manoeuvres to the innocent people of this poor country. The most painful is that one party cannot tolerate another which is apparently leading the country only to some awful uncertainty.

It is regretfully observed that presently no party is doing anything just for the greater interest of the country, but is doing rather everything possible for self-interest of the party, which is really undestorable and unbecoming of any patriot. This sort of activities are giving fuel to the fire of terrorism, dishonesty and disorder, which at any cost must be brought to an end.

It is therefore, earnestly requested to every sensitive citizen of this country to please come forward to reject those political manoeuvres which only theoretically speak big; but practically yield nothing fruitful.

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OPINION

Dog in the Manger

Two items in Nov 18 newspapers aimed at the same target: hartal. The first item is a survey done by the Bangladesh Human Rights Commission which concludes that 90% of Dhaka inhabitants oppose hartal. Especially interesting is the higher disapproval rate among industrial workers, rickshaw-pullers, and truck-drivers (100% disapproval in the latter two cases). The other item is a BBC journalist's analysis that "hartals scare away foreign investors". Of course neither of the two news items are particularly startling, they are newsworthy only because they come from slightly non-traditional sources (surveys and BBC radio broadcasts as opposed to local politicians at Paltan Maidan, etc.). That the urban underclass would disapprove of hartals is common sense, each half day hartal equals half day earnings for them. As for foreign investors — well, hartals even scare away Bangladeshi investors from abroad (who might be more immune to this sight). My cousin, who is settled in the US, has been looking at options for setting up a software project in Bangladesh. But when he came here to get married, the whole ceremony had to be rushed through in two days because the city was in the grips of 'dawn to dusk' hartals (this was in the Ershad era). The incident dealt quite a blow to his perception of the stability of Bangladesh's investment environment. The fact that hartals have continued during the time of the present government means that he will probably continue to adopt a 'wait and see' approach with regards to his project.

Why are local political parties so unwilling to channel disputes through parliament? That ostentatious House on Manik Mia Avenue is there so that people don't have to beat each others brains out on the streets. The other day, I was looking through an old monograph by Dr Keith Callard, entitled

"Political Forces in Pakistan (1947-1959)". The article attempts to explain the reasons for continuing political instability and the failure of the parliamentary system in Pakistan. Though the analysis is now dated by over 30 years, some of his conclusions bear an uncanny similarity to contemporary Bangladesh politics. In attempting to differentiate between the path to self governance in Asia and older parliamentary models, Callard points out that: "In the older Dominions each step on the road had been accepted by both the 'home' government and the colonial politicians... In India, at least from 1919, the major political leaders were prepared to use the interim constitutional forms only as a device for bringing about the end of British rule."

What was the result of this marriage of convenience? Callard continues: "The task of the patriot in the generation that preceded independence was to defy the state, to reduce it to impotence.... The struggle for independence has, in some ways, left a heritage that is hard to reconcile with democratic government."

Later, we arrive at the point where Callard's 1959 analysis closely resembles 'politics' in Bangladesh today: "... all anti-government actions become legitimate, and the idea of a 'loyal' opposition disappears."

Politicians in Bangladesh would do well to recall the reasons for Callard's pessimism in 1959 about Pakistani politics (of course, amnesia being such an essential asset in local politics, they might wish to consult newspapers from the era). Jinnah's death and Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination left no strong centre in Pakistani politics. The Governor General's position was taken up by Ghulam Mohammed, and then Iskander Mirza. The PM's chair passed through Khwaja Najmuddin, Mohammed Ali Bogra and, between March 1956 and

October 1958, Chaudhri Mohammed Ali, Hossain Shahid Suhrawardy, L. L. Chundrigar and Malik Feroze Khan Noon. Alongside instability in leadership cliques, domestic issues including the demand for a ban on the Ahmadiya religious sect, outrage over Suhrawardy's support for the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt in 1956, peasant-landlord relations in NWFP, the killing of the West Pakistan Chief Minister and East Pakistan Deputy Speaker, etc. kept the country convulsed in continuing chaos. In 1958, General Ayub Khan responded favourably to President Mirza's request to take power, and, within three weeks, ousted Mirza from the President's position.

The political instability, and especially the failure of the parliamentary system in the 1950s gave the Pakistan army leadership an excuse to step in. Upon assuming power, Ayub Khan rationalized his decision by saying, "We must understand that democracy cannot work in a hot climate. To have democracy we must have a cold climate like Britain." In addition, he also claimed that, "... all the politicians had been tried and found wanting, there was no one else left on the civil side." Ayub Khan, "Friends not Masters", Oxford UP: 1967. While this logic could easily be debated, the fact remained that a great many people had become so embittered by their first taste of democracy that they were beginning to believe statements like this. Today's politicians should bear in mind that, by taking all issues and debates to the streets, they are not only destroying the economic stability of the nation and causing suffering for the urban working class, but also creating a situation harmful to the continuation of democracy in Bangladesh.

Naem Mohaiemen
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