

Khaleda's Sensible Decision

This is not a change of gear, but seemingly a change in the substance of Opposition politics in the country. Begum Zia's assertion that her demand for early election stems from her belief that polls are the only means to change government puts opposition politics, which has been on the mend for some time anyway, firmly on course now. This is the most heartening departure that Begum Zia has marked from her hitherto one-point refrain — either the government resign or face ouster — which obviously carried no conviction in a democracy. This also baffled the electorate a great deal because of the no-confidence expressed in its verdict handed in the last general election. It impinged on the principle of popular sovereignty.

In a functioning democracy the ruling party can be unseated from power before the end of its tenure only by constitutional means and not through street agitation or calls for a movement to oust it. This has been our consistent editorial position on the one-point agenda that ruled the opposition roost so far. And Begum Zia's latest eschewing of the ouster call and taking to the democratic means for a change of government have vindicated our stance. We have only recently suggested editorially that Begum Zia's demand for mid-term polls and her call for toppling the government are mutually contradictory positions. Happily, this contradiction has been overcome and she has settled for a purely electoral course. We think this should be a turning point in national politics.

Significantly, BNP's strikingly positive outlook comes as a sequel to a series of moves on its part triggered by the feel of popular pulse, something which we tried to implore the political parties to go by. It has been a gradual expansion of the circle of positivism with the BNP ranging from half-day hartal through use of alternatives to hartal to seeking a change of government via elections alone. In-between, the opposition leader put out a robust call for dialogue adding that 'all problems' could be resolved through it.

For her part Begum Zia has moved full circle ahead and it is evidently for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina now to reciprocate the same and bring about an early rapprochement for the good of the country as well as their own.

You've Done Us Proud

At the Grange Cricket Ground in Edinburgh, Scotland, expatriate Bangladeshis waved green-and-red flags, danced and sang. Back in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country, the streets reverberated with youngsters singing, dancing, chanting slogans and exploding fire-crackers at dead hours of night. The occasion certainly demanded such wild celebrations: our cricketers have made history. They have carved their first-ever win in the game's premier event, the World Cup.

Thank you, cricketers. You have made us immensely proud.

Monday's win against Scotland has certainly erased memories of Bangladesh's nightmarish start to their first appearance in cricket's elite assemblage. No one, not even the staunchest of supporters, had expected the cricketers to triumph over either New Zealand or the West Indies. The meek surrender before the Kiwis was not what everyone wanted, either. They wanted Aminul Islam and his men to fight with honour, even in defeat. They wanted the combative zeal as displayed against the Caribbeans. Thankfully, the cricketers have lived up to expectations against the Scots. It was a promise kept, a dream fulfilled.

If anyone can be singled out for individual contribution, it definitely is Minhazul Abedin. When chips were down, the former national skipper showed dogged determination to lead his side out of the woods to a respectable total. Not only that, he also chipped in with a valuable wicket when the Scots appeared coasting. Minhaz more than justified his late, and controversial, inclusion in the World Cup squad with his sterling performance. Credit also goes to the bowlers and the fielders. Even when the Scots were doing well, they never gave up hopes, and their resolve paid the dividend at the end.

True, as the reigning ICC Trophy champions, Bangladesh were favoured to win the 'battle of the babes'. However, that does not, in any way, undermine the cricketers' achievement. A win in the World Cup, whoever it comes against, is a fabulous feat, no matter what the detractors say.

Fare well, cricketers, for the rest of the championship.

Highhandedness on Highway

A transport barricade on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway on Monday totally disrupted vehicular movement on this important road for long eight hours. According to newspaper reports, a police patrol of Bandar thana led by an assistant sub-inspector had demanded a sum of Tk five hundred from a truck driver. The latter agreeing to pay Tk two hundred only, the allegedly enraged patrol party went to the point of beating up the truck driver and breaking his legs and arms. The news spread quickly and soon the place swarmed with transport workers from nearby Shimrail truck stand and they put up a barricade at 7 in the morning. This resulted in a traffic jam on both sides of the highway that was almost forty kilometres long. PM's security force was also caught in the barricade.

Thousands of travelling people were thrown into utter confusion and acute hardship as they abandoned their transports and many buses returned to Dhaka from Shimrail as they could not proceed further. Lot of tension was generated because of the police high-handedness and a couple of policemen were also roughed up by the barricading transport workers. The situation eased around noon when senior police officials with the help of the Union Parishad chairman of Siddirgonj and leaders of the truck drivers talked them out of the barricade and ordered temporary suspension of the police officer and four of his accomplices.

Police have been known for their habit of extorting money and the nexus between them and the transport workers is also an open secret. But how dare they beat up a driver who was within his rights to refuse a toll? The stories of police excesses are all too many these days and if the government is found wanting in applying brake on these it might get unpopular very quickly. So rein in the wayward among the police force to justify the public money spent to maintain it.

Sonia Gandhi, the President of the Indian National Congress is the centre of Indian politics today. The tussle surrounding her is likely to play a large part in the forthcoming Indian general elections.

Indian general elections are due in the autumn of this year. The last Indian government, led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpeyi, collapsed after a run of eleven months. For some time past India has been living with unstable coalitions. In the latest case the coalition collapsed when the lady politician from the south of India Jayalalitha pulled the rug from under the feet of Vajpeyi. Nobody levelled any serious charges against Vajpeyi. He simply had to go and that was that. Since he lived on the largesse of assorted parties, once one of them, in this case Jayalalitha, pulled out of the coalition, it collapsed.

The second largest party in the Indian parliament, Indian National Congress, announced grandly that they would be able to form a coalition government. That effort fizzled out within a very short time. That left the President of the Republic no other option than to dissolve the Parliament and call for fresh elections.

The two largest national parties are the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). The results will not be determined in a straight fight between the two. Over the half century of Indian indepen-

High Stakes Politics in India

The stand taken by Sonia is reminiscent of the stand taken by late President John F Kennedy in 1960. When Kennedy was campaigning to become President of the USA, he was attacked rather viciously because he was a Roman Catholic. The White House of the USA had never had a Roman Catholic. John F Kennedy faced the situation head on and won handily.

ence, regional parties have become important like the AIADMK of Jayalalitha or the Samajbadi Dal, the Communists and many assorted parties of the Left and the Right.

The forthcoming elections are unlikely to produce an outright winner. Coalition is very much on the cards. What, however, is important is the overall performance of the two largest parties. The Indian National Congress had a steady erosion of popularity through decades of exercising power.

For instance, in the largest Indian state Uttar Pradesh, with the largest number of seats in the Parliament, traditionally the stronghold of the Congress, the situation came to such a pass that in the outgoing Parliament, the Congress did not have a single member. Indeed since the Babri Masjid episode, the Muslims of India numbering nearly 125 million, one-seventh of the population, have progressively abandoned their party — the Congress.

The rise of Sonia Gandhi to the top position of the oldest Indian political party — the Indian National Congress — has to be viewed from this angle. Among other things it is really to woo the Muslim voters back within the fold of the Congress. She belongs to, willy nilly, the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. And in

success to some extent in winning seats for their candidates. And she took the plunge some time back and was elected the President of the Indian National Congress. There were nummuring in the corridors of power of her Italian origin and Roman Catholic religion.

It has been repeatedly stressed that for nearly fifteen years after her marriage she had not taken the Indian nationality. These rumours were originating mostly from the camp of the powerful Mahan-

ashtra politician Sharad Pawar. He, however, did not challenge her directly until very recently.

The situation is reminiscent of the early days of Indira Gandhi, when power broker put her on the highest pedestal of state power of India, with the expectation of manipulating her. It is now well known how those power brokers miscalculated because Indira Gandhi rose to become a powerful Prime Minister of India.

Sensing power slipping out

that they did not want Sonia to resign as President of the Congress party but she claimed to the post of Prime Minister since it was a question of 'national integrity, principle and country's prestige'.

Faced with this challenge, Sonia Gandhi resigned from the post of President of the Indian National Congress. This as expected, triggered an avalanche of resignations from important posts by leaders of Indian National Congress. There was a veritable return Sonia's campaign and chances were that she would be prevailed upon to withdraw her resignation. And she has returned, perhaps stronger on the political scene.

There are political pundits who have stated that this whole operation has been stage-managed by Congress big-wigs to give a fresh coat of varnish on their sagging prestige and popularity.

It did not take long for the situation to come to a head. The powerful Congress Working Committee has expelled the three leaders. It was being pro-

pounded that the departure of these three leaders would lead to a serious split within the party. That looks less than certain. The stand taken by Sonia is reminiscent of the stand taken by late President John F Kennedy in 1960. When Kennedy was campaigning to

return to power and it would appear for the masses of India, Sonia's foreign-ness would count for little. At least that is the meaning of the decision of the working committee of the Indian National Congress.

What is certain is that for the present a very interesting political game is being played in Delhi. It is not between Ram or Rome but rather between Chanakya and Machiavelli.

these five will, primarily, have to bear personal responsibility jointly and severally. They will be under threat of losing their job immediately. By this collective responsibility will be ensured:

— the whole plan of action will have to be codified in such a manner so as to keep the secretarial staff in total darkness.

— the other members of the team will have no idea till they actually reach the place of raid;

— dodge the source about the date and time of actual operation so that he is not able to play a double role;

— depute a small team to survey the place before actual operation;

— retain special incentive to all the team members provided the operation succeeds in terms of the information given by the source.

There could be many more deterrent measures to prevent forehand leakage. The team leaders must caution themselves against such underhand activity on the part of any one in the team. They must be kept under threat to lose their job or summarily dismissed. The appropriate authority may consider these points and determine the date and time of the operation;

— the number of persons involved in the plan-making should be restricted to a maximum of five. They will be under oath not to divulge the contents of the plan, nor even discuss it with own family members under any circumstance;

— in case of divulgence detected upon actual implementation of the operational plan all

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