

# Indian Elections to Take Place on Schedule Political Parties Evolve their Strategies

*As the polls are now going to take place as scheduled belying speculations that voting may be delayed due to extraordinary circumstances centring around a national crisis like "Kargil", the political parties have swung into electioneering with an eye to gain as much as possible from different issues, including the "Kargil" as well.*

THE "Kargil" issue is now the main topic of discussion in India. The "intrusion" into the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) in the Kashmir region and the determined efforts by the Indian forces to flush out the "intruders" is obviously the issue that is currently on the lips of everybody in India. But this cannot obscure the fact that India is slowly approaching a major national event — the coming general elections. The situation in Kashmir has pushed the polls due to the late September this year, to a relatively less important position in the political and other circles including the media. Otherwise, the political scenario ahead of the national elections ought to be more intense and polls issues ought to receive top priority. And this is understandable as it is only expected that a situation such as Kargil will only overshadow others.

But the beauty of a democracy and a constitutional government is that everything is done within certain parameters that govern the affairs of a nation. The tense and crucial circumstances centring around the "Kargil" issue notwithstanding, elections are drawing near and the voting is set to take place on schedule. Any doubts about the polls taking place on schedule has been set at rest by the chief election commissioner M.S. Gill, who said that the election commission was continuing its work for the balloting in September.

Under the Indian constitution, the country must have a new lower house of parliament (Lokshava) within six months of the dissolution of the last house. As such, India must have a new lower house of parliament directly elected by the people by October this year. That the pattern of democratic rule where the will of the people is reflected remains unaffected despite a national crisis is unquestionably something admirable.

The political parties — particularly who are in power — are obviously more taken up with the "Kashmir" situation since

they are associated with dealing with the problem and are answerable to the people. But none is really lagging behind on the matters of electioneering. I was in New Delhi on a private visit more than two weeks ago. Any period that marks the interregnum between the dissolution of a parliament and the next elections is arguably supposed to be most hectic in a democracy and more so in India which is the largest democracy in the world. The election atmosphere had emerged as soon as the Vajpayee government lost the "trust confidence" by a single vote in the Lokshava and subsequently new polls were announced following the failure of the opposition parties to come up with an alternative government and the Lokshava was dissolved.

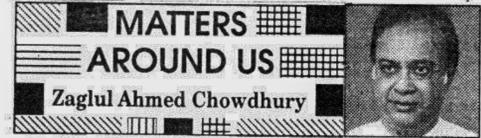
performance against Zimbabwe or the remarkable win against Pakistan and the latest situation in "Kargil" rather than whether it was the BJP or the Congress or the leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav or Kanshi Ram who would fare well in the polls in the UP state.

However, the elections have to take place and at one stage none can really afford to turn a "blind eye" to such a national event that would determine who would rule the country in the coming days. The present government is an interim one that continues till the polls so that the country does not remain in a political vacuum. Political parties have already begun firing salvo at opponents and not surprisingly, the "Kargil" issue is now an election issue as well since those in power are seeking

under the very nose of a tight security, the "delay" in flushing out the "infiltrators and Pakistani regulars," and certain comments by those at the helm of the state like that of the defence minister George Fernandes that the government might be willing to give a "safe passage" to the "infiltrators" if they chose to vacate the occupied places.

Main opposition Congress has demonstrated in New Delhi protesting government's "failure" to tackle the crisis with efficiency. Former prime minister I.K. Gujral and West Bengal chief minister and veteran politician Jyoti Basu have called for the formation of a "national government" in a situation like this so that an eye to electioneering with an eye to gain as much as possible from different issues, including the "Kargil" as well. The government rejected the ideas and said that the crisis and the fighting in the "Kargil" was difficult in nature but was being dealt with effectively at political and diplomatic levels. It pointed out that an "all party" meeting had been convened on the crisis. The government says that New Delhi earned a great degree of support on the issue at the international level and the "delay" in flushing out the "intruders" is mainly because of the difficult terrain and other adverse conditions.

As the polls are now going to take place as scheduled belying speculations that voting may be delayed due to extraordinary circumstances centring around a national crisis like "Kargil", the political parties have swung into electioneering with an eye to gain as much as possible from different issues, including the "Kargil" as well. The pitch of electioneering is getting feverish slowly although "Kashmir" issue continues to dominate the political scene in India. The coming days will witness larger degree of activities and finally the crescendo, centring the national elections. After all in a democracy, people's verdict is supreme and there can be no delay on this, and this should be the prime concern in any pattern of governance in any country.



**MATTERS AROUND US**  
Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

As expected, the electioneering had started gaining momentum with the major political parties as well as the smaller ones evolving their electoral strategies. But then came the "Kargil" issue rather somewhat unexpectedly as the "intrusion" caught many in India napping. I saw in the Indian capital, the polls fever disappeared from the main scene and two issues came to the fore — "Kargil" and the World Cup cricket. The media — print and electronic — were replete with reports and analyses on these two issues while the election related matters were treated only as secondary. When I asked a waiter at a guest house that he felt about the election prospects of different parties in India and more particularly in his own state, Uttar Pradesh, he appeared to be more keen to talk about cricket and "Kargil". He talked more about why India had failed to reach the semi-finals or its disappointing per-

to assert that they are tackling the problem with "great ability" while the opposition is questioning the government's claim. The opposition is calling for a session of the upper house of the parliament (Rajya Sabha) which is very much in existence to discuss the "Kashmir" situation. The upper house is not directly elected by the people as it is chosen by the parliamentarians and legislators of the state assemblies. Nonetheless, its members who are generally called "elders", can discuss various matters and of course, at the moment, the "Kargil" issue. But the government has turned it down to the time being, saying there is no need for such a session now. The opposition parties while throwing their support and weight behind the government on the issue and lauding the armed forces are seriously questioning certain matters relating to the crisis like how the "intruders" could get into the Indian side of the LoC and occupy several peaks

# Liberation and Beyond

by J N Dixit

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# War and the Birth of Bangladesh

Part IV



A major political mistake at the surrender ceremony was the Indian military high command's failure to ensure the presence of General MAG Osmani, Commander from the Bangladesh side on the Joint Command, at the ceremony and making him a signatory. The formal excuse explaining his absence was that his helicopter did take off but could not reach Dhaka in time for the surrender schedule. But there was widespread suspicion that his helicopter had been sent astray so that he could not reach Dhaka in time and the focus of attention at the ceremony was rivetted on the Indian military commanders. This was an unfortunate aberration which India could have avoided. The event generated much resentment among Bangladeshi political circles. Osmani's presence at the surrender ceremony could have helped in avoiding many of the political misunderstandings which affected Indo-Bangladesh relations in the initial days of Bangladesh's independence.

India, simultaneously with the surrender, announced that it would implement a unilateral ceasefire on the western sector from 8 pm, Indian Standard Time on December 17, 1971. India informed the UN Security Council and all the world capitals about this decision.



A sad event casting a long shadow on the moment of supreme victory... bodies of intellectuals at the killing grounds of Rayer Bazar, Dhaka.

The end of the conflict in the eastern theatre was fraught with tension and many critical problems. Keeping 93,000 prisoners of war in safe custody, while managing a post war situation was both logistically and in terms of law and order a nightmare. There were no guarantee that some sections of the Pakistani prisoners of war would not mutiny and create a violent situation. There was a real danger of the people of Bangladesh indulging in massive retaliatory violence against the prisoners of war as well as civilian officials and authorities who had supported Pakistan. Several groups of the Mukti Bahini were in an emotionally volatile mood. They had to be prevented from going on a rampage against the para-military cadres created by the Pakistani Government to maintain law and order in East Pakistan. These cadres, together with Pakistan soldiers, had indulged in extreme brutalities against Bangladeshis. Compounding the critical situation was the presence of nearly two hundred thousand Mohajirs, migrants mostly from Bihar and UP, who were concentrated in the Mirpur suburb of Dhaka. These people had actively collaborated with the military regime of Yahya Khan and were a particular target of the wrath of Bangladeshis. They had to be protected. Pakistani armed forces did not help matters by organising calculated, unprovoked and brutal violence against Bangladeshi civilians during the last phase of the war.

It was in such a harrowing and sensitive context that the Indian armed forces undertook the complex and dangerous task at hand after their resounding military success. The whole situation found a dramatic expression at that time in a photograph which appeared on the front pages of many newspapers of six or eight Mukti Bahini cadres bayoneting to death a para-military cadre of the Pakistanis belonging either to the Razakars or the Al Badars. Another unfortunate aspect of post-surrender developments in Bangladesh must be put on record after this gap of 27 years. A small section of the Indian armed forces personnel including some officers behaved more like a conquering than a liberating army. They collected war booty in different forms, took away cars and valuables for personal use in the hubris and arrogance of the military victory. It affected the reputation of our armed

forces for a brief period. The Indian Army high command and the Government of India redeemed themselves by taking firm disciplinary action against officers and men who were involved in this acquisitive and illegal exercise.

The Mujibnagar Government shifted to Dhaka by December 20, 1971. AK Ray, head of the Branch Secretariat, moved to Dhaka as New Delhi's Principal Liaison Officer to the Government headed by Syed Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed.

The main worry and concern now was the fate of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. There was anxiety about him despite the surrender in Dhaka and the unilateral ceasefire coming into force in the western theatre of war.

Before recalling the high drama that attended Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's release by Pakistan and his return to Dhaka, note should be taken of the deliberate distortion of the causes of the war which had just concluded. It is important for the peoples of Bangladesh and India to remember that the political aspirations of Bangladeshis a majority of whom are Muslims found no sympathy or objective response from many Muslim countries. India and Bangladesh had to stand up not only to the hostility of the two super powers of the US and China and to indifference of the western democracies but also to the uncomprehending opposition of Islamic countries. That they succeeded in resisting this combined pressure was entirely due to the deep commitment and grit of the freedom fighters of Bangladesh and India's unswerving conviction that the cause of Bangladeshis was just.

The military victory liberated Bangladesh but it left many problems to be tackled some of which have been mentioned earlier. None knew how the defeated military regime of Pakistan would deal with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Will they execute him in frustration? Will they keep him jailed for a long time? Will they release him and let him go back to Bangladesh? One waited for answers to these and many other questions. There was a great degree of uncertainty regarding Mujibur Rahman's fate between December 16, 1971 and January 5, 1972. India had reports that the Americans and the Western democracies were exerting considerable pressure on Pakistan to release Mujibur Rahman and let him return to Bangladesh. With the appointment of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan early in December, 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's fate rested more on Bhutto's inclinations. Given the bitterness of Bhutto about Mujibur Rahman and the background of his opposition to Mujib becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan early in 1971, the Bangladeshis and Indian anxieties were only heightened. But being politically astute and having been subjected to pressures from the Americans and Western democracies Bhutto agreed to release Mujibur Rahman. An unconfirmed deal which was reported at that time was that Bhutto wanted Mujibur Rahman to persuade India to release the 93,000 Pakistani prisoners of war with India. He also had asked Mujibur Rahman to prevent, to the extent possible, war crime trials of Pakistani officials in Bangladesh or India. These unconfirmed reports indicated that Mujibur Rahman's response was fairly positive on the first demand — the release of Pakistani prisoners of war. About the second demand Mujibur Rahman was reported to have told Bhutto, that he would have to examine the public mood and the legal position before deciding on war crime trials. He said the decision would not be purely on political and emotional grounds, arising from the liberation war and events preceding it.

I had come back from the Security Council meetings on December 24. I received information from our intelligence sources on the morning of January 7, 1972 that Mujibur Rahman had been released and flown to an unknown destination from where he was to make arrangements for his return to Dhaka. By monitoring Pakistani international telephone calls and through other sources, we learnt by the late afternoon of January 7 that Mujibur Rahman had been flown to Ankara in Turkey from where he was to go to London. By the morning of January 8 Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad along with a senior official of the newly constituted Bangladesh Foreign Office, Farooq Ahmed Chowdhury, arrived in Delhi. Samad informed DF Dhar that Mujibur Rahman would be flying back to Dhaka on January 9 afternoon. He also indicated that Mujibur Rahman would like to make a stop over in Delhi en route to convey his thanks to the Government and the people of India and to Mrs. Indira Gandhi for the support which India had given to Bangladesh liberation struggle.

(Continued)

# Nelson Mandela: A Model of a Leader

by Harun ur Rashid

*Mr Mandela was always consistent in his behaviour with his friends. He did not abandon Col. Gaddafi, or President Fidel Castro or Chairman Yasser Arafat. They all supported ANC during his struggle against apartheid and he was grateful to them. He visited Libya by air, although he knew that his air journey was in breach of the UN sanctions.*

ON 16 June President Nelson Mandela (80) made an emotional farewell to his compatriots at the inauguration of his successor Thabo Mbeki as South Africa's first black post-apartheid President. Presidents, princes and representatives of governments of 130 countries gathered around the sand stone building's amphitheatre to pay tribute to President Mandela. Mr. Mandela completed his five years of the office of the Presidency with great distinction and courage. He was the man who was able to bridge the fault lines of world politics. He was as popular with Col Gaddafi as he was to President Clinton. This was a rare achievement for Mr. Mandela.



(Scotland) is an instance in point. He leaves his office with his reputation as one of the best known and admired leaders in the 20th century. In a farewell ceremony in Parliament, the Liberal Democratic Party leader Tony Leon summed up what every one else thought about Mr. Mandela: "We will not see your like again."

The writer, a Barrister, is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Europe, Geneva.

Mr Mandela, born in 1918, was the son of a hereditary chief of Xhosa tribe in the eastern Transkei region. He entered a black university but was expelled for leading a student strike. He moved to Johannesburg, worked as a guard at a gold mine, then obtained a law degree by correspondence courses. During the Second World War he joined the African National Congress (ANC) following career as a lawyer in Johannesburg. He directed campaign of defiance against racist policies of the South African government between 1944-1964. In 1964, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for political offences. In February 1990, he was released from the prison to launch into talks with the white government for a peaceful transition to democracy and multi-racial rule. In 1993, he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mr. De Klerk for dismantling apartheid. In 1994 he was South Africa's first black President.

People may ask the question: what did make Mr. Mandela so great and unique? While in prison, for the first ten years he broke rocks in a limestone quarry on Robben Island, just off Cape Town. During this time he commanded respect from the jail guards because of his politeness and quiet dignity. He was the only person in prison who was addressed as "Mr. Mandela" by the guards. In return he was known to be courteous to them and would address each by rank and name.

In February 1990, he was released from prison after 27 years by then President F W de Klerk of South Africa. Apartheid began to unravel in the '70s. South Africa became ostracised from the international community for the policy of apartheid and it was an eye sore for the rest of the world. Sanctions gradually began to bite hard the economy of the country and there was no alternative but to abolish the degrading apartheid policy. Only 35 years ago whites,

blacks, coloureds and Indians were born in separate hospitals, lived in separate neighbourhoods and were buried in separate cemeteries. He stood firm in his challenge for the respect of human rights and he won at the end. The white leaders of South Africa saw the transition from a leader of an illegal party to an elected head of the state.

Mr Mandela has often stood above politics. At the end of this century, he was a leader who was able to walk world stage with charisma and assurance. His honesty, humility and warmth charmed all who would meet him. He could easily relate to a common person on the street without appearing awkward. He exuded confidence and trust among others during the meetings. He had an infectious personality and his smile was arresting. (During my diplomatic assignment in Geneva, I had an opportunity to meet with him in 1990 and discuss many third world issues and I can personally attest to his great candour charm.)

When he came to power, there was a fear that racial violence and hatred would wreck the political landscape of South Africa. But his presidency has been marked by a dedication to reconciliation among different races in the country. Despite the opposition of some of his party members, he pursued relentlessly in uniting the nation and formed a government with former President de Klerk. Some younger ANC members complained that Mr. Mandela was too moderate. Under his leadership the national unity was restored and this was a great achievement considering the past racial violence between blacks and whites in the country.

Almost all African countries after independence had degenerated into military or civil dictatorship and as a result the countries were plagued by civil wars, gross violation of human rights, massive corrup-

tion and economic downfall. South African archbishop Desmond Tutu captured the mood when he said in 1990: "God's children in Africa have suffered because there is less freedom now than during the colonial times." South Africa remained democratic and the election was held in 1994 and 1999 under the terms of its constitution. Under the constitution, a 400-member National Assembly and a 90-member Senate would comprise the legislature, based on a system of proportional representation.

Another landmark quality in his personality was the declaration in 1994 that he would serve as President for one term only. This is a rare event in the developing countries. Most of the leaders in the third world cling to power as long as they can and very few transfer power voluntarily. He is also the first to acknowledge that his term was not enough to redress all the inequities of the blacks. This was one of the courageous decisions he had to declare to his people and he did not want to be seen as a person who would be able to deliver all the goodies to his people. He was candid to them as to what he could deliver during his term. Here lies the strength of his character and sincerity.

Mr Mandela was always consistent in his behaviour with his friends. He did not abandon Col. Gaddafi, or President Fidel Castro or Chairman Yasser Arafat. They all supported ANC during his struggle against apartheid and he was grateful to them. He visited Libya by air, although he knew that his air journey was in breach of the UN sanctions.

Mr Mandela left political stage accomplishing what few political leaders could ever hope to achieve. He became the conscience-keeper of the world. He lent his personality to defuse most intractable political stand-offs. His role in brokering a deal for the trial of Libyans for the alleged role of air disaster in Lockerbie

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