

South Asia

Faith in Democracy

Poll fatigue does not deter Indians from voting, reports P. Jayaram from New Delhi

DESPITE all-pervading cynicism about the political process, Indians once again demonstrated their faith in democracy in the just concluded national elections by recording a reasonably high voting percentage.

A total of 58.3 per cent of the country's 605 million voters exercised their franchise in the month-long staggered elections, polling for which was completed Sunday. Counting of votes starts tomorrow at 1350 centres across the country and all results are expected by late Thursday.

Election officials said the voting percentage may well cross the 61.97 per cent during the last general elections in 1998 when polling for the remaining five of the 543 elective seats in the 545-member Lok Sabha, or lower house of Parliament, is held.

Polling in five constituencies were postponed following the killing of a candidate in Dhubri in the northeastern state of Assam and floods in four constituencies in eastern

Bihar state. The highest percentage of polling was recorded in the second general election 1957 when 62.2 per cent of the voters cast their ballots. In the first election in 1952, the percentage was 61.2.

The lowest polling was recorded in 1962 when only 55 per cent of the voters took the trouble to trek to the polling booths, but election officials pointed out that even then the percentage of polling was higher than in most of the Western democracies.

Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill said he expected to submit the list of elected candidates to the 13 Lok Sabha on October 10. "Certainly we hope to go to the President on the morning of October 10," he told a video press conference. He was confident that the counting process, which begins tomorrow, would be completed by the night of October 7.

He said poll observers had been asked to take the first available flight to Delhi there after to bring copies of the doc-

uments, certifying the election of candidates, to enable the Election Commission to constitute the Lok Sabha by October 10.

He said the results from 45 constituencies, where electronic voting machines were used, were expected by tomorrow afternoon. By the evening of October 6, about 100 results are expected. He noted that in 1998 it took two days for the results to come in, but the Election Commission hoped to do better this time.

He said the counting process would start at 0800 hrs at 1345 centres across the country and would go on uninterrupted till the results were declared.

He said a total of 924 election-related violent incidents with 138 deaths were reported during this election, as against 1,541 incidents with 251 deaths in 1998 and 1,209 incidents with 313 deaths in 1996.

But, he said, if the totality of the election process was taken into consideration, there was cause for satisfaction.

-India Abroad News Service

South Asia Needs Humane Governance

By Khadija Haq

SOUTH ASIA is facing a crisis of governance, which, if left unchecked, could halt the region's democratic progress, and the economic and social well-being of its teeming masses. Containing nearly one-fourth of humanity, South Asia is characterized by governments that represent the poor and aid the rich; taxation that is inefficient and regressive; and expenditures that are misdirected and ineffective.

In addition, millions of dollars are transferred each year out of the region through corruption. South Asia today features societies that assert the rights of some but perpetuate the exclusion of others.

Formal institutions of governance have often bypassed the voiceless majority. These are the unfortunate many that suffer from multiple deprivations on account of their income, creed, gender or religion. They have not only been excluded from the benefits of growth but have also failed to gain political empowerment.

Some of the worst consequences of their exclusion are seen in the high rates of crime and violence throughout the region. South Asia has become a breeding ground of crime and violence in its increasingly polarized societies. From the murders and armed robberies that instil insecurity and fear to the internal conflicts that have tainted the region, from

the Shia-Sunni conflict in Pakistan to the caste-based crimes in India, South Asia seems to be at war with itself.

Income disparities in South Asia are one of the largest in the world. The richest one-fifth of the South Asians earns almost 40 per cent of the region's income, while the poorest one-fifth earns less than ten per cent. All the countries in the region have a dramatic concentration of wealth and power among their richest members. Nor do all groups in society feel equally represented. Women are worse off, contending with exclusionary practices embedded in social structure from the time they are born.

In many South Asian states, democracy is fast turning into an empty ritual; elections are often the only bridge between the state and society. People continually feel excluded from the larger political process through which decisions that directly affect their livelihoods are made. Despite the existence of local governments in some countries, the state remains distant.

The dominance of a narrow band of elite reflects the concentrated nature of political power in South Asia. The concentration and personalization of state power has coincided with the concurrent erosion of institutions. Institutional decay is evident in parliaments that cannot protect people's in-

terests, in a civil service that is heavily politicized and unable to provide basic public services, and in a judiciary that fails to deliver social justice.

South Asia suffers from inefficient and unjust systems of economic management. The governments are large in size but low in efficiency. South Asia collects around 10 per cent of GDP in taxes, compared to the average tax revenue collections of 10-15 per cent of GDP in developing countries. Yet a bigger irony is that most of these taxes fall far more on the poor and the middle class through regressive taxes than on the rich, because nearly seventy per cent of the region's total tax revenue is obtained through levying indirect taxes.

This crushing burden of taxation on the poor is not only enormous, it is also increasing. In Pakistan, for instance, tax burden on the poorest section of the population has increased by more than 10 per cent even though tax incidence on the rich has declined by more than 4 per cent. Meanwhile, in many countries direct taxes as a proportion of GDP have actually fallen in the last decade, while huge sectors of society — most notably, agriculture — remain untaxed or under-taxed.

Much of the informal sector has no access to formal credit, even though businesses with strong political connections manage to get huge loans from public banks without even the need of paying them back. This has led to a large stock of non-performing loans. Such non-performing loans represented 21 per cent of total advances of

public banks in South Asia in 1998. Even the low levels of revenue that governments collect largely fail to materialize into pro-poor expenditures. The bulk of public spending in South Asia goes to providing non-merit subsidies, making up for losses of public corporations, maintaining a large force of civil servants, and military. Except Maldives, social sector expenditures in South Asia remain low at less than 5 per cent of GDP.

Pervasive corruption in South Asia has led to a shift in government priorities away from crucial services and towards areas that afford greater rent-seeking opportunities. Evidence of corruption in South Asia is widespread: in reduced availability and increased cost of basic social services, in allocation of resources for mega-projects, and in the breakdown of the rule of law. There is a growing perception in many parts of South Asia, that corruption has floated upwards — from petty corruption in the 1950s to mid-level corruption in the 1960s and 1970s, to corruption at the very highest levels of the state in the 1980s and 1990s.

With life so insecure and liberty so vulnerable, South Asia is in need of a new compact between the people and the state. Without such a compact, without an abiding belief by citizens that the government can fairly provide for them and adjudicate disputes among them, the region has seen in recent years a bewildering maze of battles between competing interests, pit-

ting caste against caste, Muslim against Hindu, Tamil against Sinhalese, Mohajir against Sindhi, and ultimately, the rise of insurgence and criminality. South Asian states need to redirect their priorities. They must refocus their efforts towards the core human development concerns. The concept of humane governance needs to be taken up by the South Asian states. Humane governance is good governance dedicated to securing human development. It requires effective participation of people in state, civil society, and private sector activities that are conducive to human development. Good governance has to go beyond good politics or even good economic management.

Humane governance, as defined, must lead to broad-based economic growth and social development as means to greater human development. Governance must be seen by the people as operating in their own interests — transparent and accountable to all its constituents, and conducive to building a society in which all believe they are treated fairly and decently.

"Human Development in South Asia 1999" Report on Crisis of Governance, produced by Mahabul Haq Human Development Centre, provides a concrete and realistic reform agenda for promoting 'humane governance' in the region.

The writer is the President of Mahabul Haq Human Development Centre. Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

Expediency Marks Debate on Government Formation

Once again, a dispute has broken out over what procedure Rashtrapathi Bhavan should follow in installing a new Government at the Centre in India. Mukund Padmanabhan analyses the entire picture

ONCE again, a dispute has broken out over what procedure Rashtrapathi Bhavan should follow in installing a new Government at the Centre. This time the debate has been provoked by the Congress(I) which — enthused by indications of late swing in its favour, particularly in Uttar Pradesh — has suddenly woken up to the possibility that while it may not have the necessary numbers to form a Government, it might just emerge as the single largest party in the Lok Sabha.

Therefore, the sudden claim from Mr. Kapil Sibal that it is only appropriate that the largest party is invited to form the Government and not the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance which in the Congress(I) spokesman's view is "not a pre-poll alliance but a political hoax". Quite apparently, the party is pinning its hopes on the event of being given the first chance at Government formation by the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, it will somehow drum up a majority with the help of other parties.

Quite predictably, the BJP has responded by stating that the "convention" of inviting the single largest party does not hold good in the present circumstances as the NDA has fought the election as a formal pre-poll alliance. In other words, when it comes to who is invited first, a pre-poll alliance must take precedence over the largest single party.

Going by the thrust and counter-thrust of the debate, it is quite apparent that it has been dictated solely by political expediency. After all, it was the BJP which was vociferous in de-

fending the "convention" when it was invited as the largest single party to form the Government — which lasted all of 13 days — by the then President, Mr. Shankar Dayal Sharma in 1996.

As for the Congress(I), its argument that the President should extend invitations only on the basis of the political parties mentioned in the notification furnished by the Election Commission is clearly a piece of post-hoc ingenuity to justify its claim that the NDA cannot be treated as a pre-poll alliance.

The Left and the former constituents of the United Front have understandably refrained from lending their vocal chords to this debate. Members of this group were the most vociferous in condemning Mr. Shankar Dayal Sharma for inviting the BJP to form the Government in 1996 — a decision the CPI(M) had described as a "travesty of democracy". Their demand that Mr. Deve Gowda should have been invited first to form the Government amounted to claiming that any combination of political parties — even a post-poll arrangement such as the United Front — that enjoyed a majority should be given precedence over the largest single party. Having adopted such a line just three years ago, the Left may find it difficult to support the Congress(I)'s assertion that the largest single party be invited.

In inviting the BJP to form the Government in 1996, Mr. Sharma was only following the precedent of Mr. R. Venkataraman who credited himself with having laid down the convention of inviting the single largest party to form the Government and leaving the rest to

the Lok Sabha. He strongly defended such a Presidential procedure in his autobiography. But the fact that the BJP Government was forced out in less than a fortnight led many to question the wisdom of such a procedure.

In 1998, Mr. K. R. Narayanan invited the single largest party (the BJP once again) but he evolved a two-stage procedure — a departure from the past. Mr. Vajpayee was invited to explore the possibility of Government formation but was invited to become Prime Minister only after the President was satisfied he enjoyed a working majority. The President followed the same procedure after the BJP Government fell, when he invited Ms. Sonia Gandhi to explore the possibility of forming an alternative Government.

It is likely that — in the event of no single party getting an absolute majority — the President will continue with this two-step exercise. In the event that the Congress(I) emerges the party with the most seats and the NDA emerges with a clear majority, it will be interesting to see what Mr. Narayanan does. In such a situation, an invitation to the Congress(I) (even in the limited sense of asking it to show sufficient evidence of majority), would be seen as a reaffirmation of the precedence given to the single largest party. If the leader of the NDA is called first, it would clearly establish the idea that a pre-poll alliance with a majority should be given precedence — a view that has been canvassed by many political analysts.

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Seeking a Way Out of the Crisis

The lack of responsible, mature and far-sighted leadership, in Pakistan, both in the government and the opposition is only matched by their non-visionary politicking, writes Dr Iftikhar H. Malik

PAKISTANIS, both at home and abroad, are baffled and saddened at the way and speed with which the country is lurching into another unnecessary and unjustifiable crisis. The lack of responsible, mature and far-sighted leadership both in the government and the opposition groups is only matched by their non-visionary and opportunistic politicking. Ironically, the prevalent situation of being put between the devil and deep sea is only adding to a sense of dismay over the very intentions and calibre of these leaders.

This is not to say, however, that the military and civil servants or even some of the political elements hold the Aladdin's lamp to lead us out of this morass since they too are part of the pervasive malaise. The on-going polarity with serious multiple ramifications only affirms two concurrent opinions: firstly, that Pakistan is falling as a state due to because of an endemic governability crisis, and secondly, that its misfortune as illustrated by periodic martial laws and pseudo-democratic interludes owes itself to the absence of a thoughtful, responsible and capable Jinnahist leadership.

While some people in the country may attribute the current crisis to some "hidden hand" or foreign machinations, the rational elements can clearly see in it the systemic failure as successive regimes have failed to deliver on distributive justice, peace and progress.

The institutional decay is the legacy of failed leadership. Once again, it is not the general society and the populace who are failing the country; it is rather the self-perpetuating structures, manipulative institutions, and self-seeking individuals who have pushed it into yet another cyclic crisis. The future seems to be uncertain, or

one interim bail-out followed by another weakening or drifty administration of similar irresponsible elements. Pakistan sadly seems stuck in this vicious cycle.

That individuals are responsible for the current crisis is not the whole truth as it will absolve the system of its innumerable faults and failures. The self-evident fact, however, remains that Mian Nawaz Sharif and his advisers are not innocent onlookers either.

With such a heavy mandate and a second-time rare opportunity, Mr. Sharif could have been a blessing to his country. He could have removed the constitutional lacunae; could have pursued a politics of cooperation and negotiation; could have safeguarded the sanctity of the courts and media and, most of all, could have ushered a long-overdue era of transparent and accountable governance.

One does not need to read long, verbose treatises to know what the Pakistanis want. They simply desire and deserve peace and justice and egalitarian socio-cultural policies. Such ideals when articulated by Jinnah made the Pakistan movement a formidable force in British India, leading to the state of the world in 1947. Yet, the gradual deviation from these ideals led to a gradual marginalization of ordinary citizenry in marked contrast with the immense uplift and prosperity of a minuscule trans-regional class of 'haves' consisting of feudal lords, senior bureaucrats and generals.

By disowning the Quaid's democratic principles and by putting the blame for it on politicians and by denigrating the political acumen of the common Pakistanis, Ayub, Yahya and Zia ruled the roost.

Tragically, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, thanks to their numerous personal and political inadequacies, have ended up justifying these gen-

erals and maybe, by default have, once again, opened the back-door for their re-entry.

Benazir Bhutto's second administration suffered from corruption at all levels, and like the generals and bureaucrats, she totally ignored the massive build-up of disapproval of her rule. A prisoner of a feudalist past and loaded with the abhorrent superficialities of the Oxbridge kind, she was indignantly indifferent to the very idea of clean and responsible leadership.

She is hoping to be the main beneficiary of the present crisis, once again misjudging the depth of popular bitterness against her. Rather than promoting healthy politics, she patronized cronyism and failed to address the needed leadership on economic or regional issues. No wonder, she now suffers from bitterness, isolation and massive desertions from her party. It will be to Sharif's folly if by default she comes back to assume the leadership once again.

Like Bhutto, Sharif is impulsively prone to crisis. In his last administration he was part of the country's ruling but mutually antagonistic triumvirate. Moeen Qureshi's interest in the military was a constant deviation from the will of future parliament exactly as Farooq Leghari-Mairaj Khalid combine did in 1996-97 despite the public outcry of 'eh-tesab first and intekhab later'. Sharif, soon after his election in 1997, retreated from many of his promises. His accountability campaign reflected more of personal vendetta and less of fairness. Despite a huge parliamentary majority, he has remained chronically insecure and wants all powers concentrated in his hands. Apprehensive of another Watoo-style defiance from Lahore, he hastened to make his own brother the chief minister of Punjab and got a loyalist elected as

president, making a farce of whatever there was of a federal system.

As if Sharif had not done enough damage to the country's civic institutions, he shocked everyone in his independence day speech with his resolution to build the controversial Kalabagh Dam. This had to be withdrawn when confronted with a massive outcry from the smaller provinces. The government's economic and financial managers soon got the administration into a confrontation with the foreign investors who had earlier benefited from the previous regime's generosity. For the IMF and the World Bank it was Sharif shooting himself in the foot.

However, Pakistan's economic fragility, thanks to total dependence on foreign and domestic loans along with a multiple waywardness, became more apparent after the tit-for-tat response to India's nuclearization in May 1998. Mr. Sharif glowed in patriotic adulation but the massive transfer of resources by the insiders followed by a rather crude freeze on foreign currency accounts made things unsavoury all around and accentuated the economic crisis facing the country.

The sanctions could have made Pakistan retrieve its own vitality but an insecure administration simply panicked. The Chaghi nuclear tests became history as the economic realities quickly surfaced to haunt the people.

Kashmir as a test case reactivated itself in Kargil soon after the Lahore Summit which had been widely appreciated in South Asia and abroad but the thoughtless move in Kargil with confused goals and uncertain strategy got Pakistan into a jam. While the official propagandists gave out conflicting explanations, hundreds on both sides got killed for no reason whatsoever.

The fundamentalists staged a quick come-back from their erstwhile marginalisation following their unpopular denouncement of Vajpayee-Sharif summit, and the world sternly rebuked Pakistan for the Kargil adventure. Because of the patriotic euphoria in India following the Kargil crisis, the BJP gained a major edge over the Congress and other liberal parties and elements in the electoral contest in that country.

The opposition forces in the newly formed alliance share a single age-old, reductionist and rather negative agenda of removing the PML(N) government; beyond that they intensely hate one another. Not only that they are divided, they, in several cases, lack proper democratic credentials or even moral scruples, but, most of all, they have no credible alternative to offer to the country. Their agenda is a recipe for further chaos, hatred and disorder.

The people of Pakistan are looking for a tangible way-out of a crisis syndrome. The politics of "strong man" through martial law or even transitional arrangements are no solutions nor are the elections in the same old tested tradition. A wider debate for basic reforms, envisaging responsible politics wedded to accountability, devolution of power, primacy of civic forces and freedom of the press and judiciary must move on to the centre stage and the leaders and public must not fall prey to a politics of vendetta and temporary gains, and of expediency. Even now it is not too late for the present government to make a fresh beginning by resorting to the politics of consensus, reconciliation and reconstruction rather than persisting in self-serving authoritarian ways.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

Globalisation is No Panacea

Lankan economists warn of dangers of globalisation. Sugeeswara Senadhira writes from Colombo

LEADING Sri Lankan economists have warned that globalisation is no panacea for all ills in developing economies and emphasised the need for defences against its negative aspects.

At a seminar on 'National Economic Policy', economists pointed out that the remedies offered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would not solve all the problems of the developing world and globalisation trends should be modified to suit the needs of such economies.

They questioned the role of international financial organisations in dictating economic policy to developing states and emphasised the need for Third World countries to adopt national development policies suited to their own socio-economic conditions.

Gamini Corea, former secretary general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said developing countries like Sri Lanka should steer away from the dictates of the Bretton Woods institutions and achieve self-sufficiency as far as possible.

"Of late there has been considerable reaction to the globalisation and liberalisation poli-

cies advocated by the IMF and the World Bank, not simply due to unfounded fears but because it was felt, with good reason, that 'integrating the world' has only served to widen the gap between the developed and developing states as a result of the higher technological development and better marketing strategies of the advanced countries," Corea told the seminar.

"There is really no need for developing nations to rely solely on the advice of the IMF or the World Bank," he said. "Any national economic policy should not be excessively ideological and excessively bound by concepts and pre-conceptions which have their origins outside the country."

Corea underlined the need to modify existing economic policy by accommodating self-sufficiency as an important aspect of national development.

"Whatever the argument may be for comparative advantage, it is extremely unwise to depend on external trade to meet basic needs such as food supplies in a world of sanctions and political instability," he warned.

Jayantha Kelegama, former Trade Secretary, said it is unwise for a developing economy to suddenly switch to market economy and liberalise trade

without any state control. "It is in the best interest of public welfare that the state engage in open competition with the private sector in such areas as food, medicine and transport in order to mitigate the negative effects of market forces and ensure that the masses get a better deal in the context of an open economy," he said.

Kelegama, who is the chancellor of Rajarata University, pointed out that state-owned ventures are not inherently unproductive or loss-making and added that the public sector suffered due to increased politicisation, ineffective management and over-staffing. "Some of the best institutions are state-managed. The largest bank in Southeast Asia, the Development Bank of Singapore, the most successful airline, Singapore Airlines, and the re-communication giant Singapore Telecom are all state-owned," he noted.

Other leading economists who participated in the seminar observed that a recent survey on the performance of the IMF had shown that over 50 per cent of the developing states that followed its advice were no better off than they were before while more than a third were actually worse off.

-India Abroad News Service

Red Alert for Indian Reds

M Abdul Hafiz writes on the Left Front in India

SPLIT in 1964 following their divergent perceptions of Sino-Indian war, the Indian communists existed in the country's politics as an odd quartet of uneven four constituents — the CPI(M), the CPI, the Forward Bloc and the RSP (Revolutionary Socialist Party). But they continued to trek their own chosen path whether in ideology or in interparty relations.

The CPI led by late SA Dange had been an ardent supporter of the Congress and soiled it by supporting the party even during the Emergency. The CPI(M) led by late Nambudiripad adopted a staunch anti-Congress posture and partnered with two other junior partners, the Forward Bloc and RSP earned dividends in three states — West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. After the 1977 rout of the Congress and rise of left power in West Bengal the CPI also gravitated towards CPI(M) to be in the common fraternity of the lefts.

By a queer turn of the events when the Congress has now lost the fulcrum of Indian electorate the once anti-Congress CPI(M) has started tilting towards the declining party with other components of the Left Front following the suit. At least the CPI (M) and CPI are now in the same fold although the smaller left parties like Forward Bloc and RSP have distanced themselves from the gambit. The CPI(M) General Secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet justifies the move with arguments that to checkmate the communal upsurge of BJP, the Congress deserves to be helped

by rallying all secular forces behind it. Jyoti Basu of the same party, however, remains circumspect on the ground that too much tilt towards Congress may be costly for the party in electoral politics.

When Surjeet cobbled up a 'grand alliance' of the secular forces in last April to replace the BJP-led coalition with Congress, the move was jolted not only by Mulayam Singh's refusal to support Sonia Gandhi; there were serious disagreements even in the left camp. The duo of Forward Bloc and RSP suddenly discovered the merit of 'equi-distance' from the BJP and Congress and remained stubborn in their refusal to support the move of Surjeet. Surprisingly even Jyoti Basu, the party patriarch, also developed a cold feet on the issue thus scuttling what the party's general secretary painstakingly devised.

Jyoti Basu has his own arithmetic of politics for West Bengal which he rules for last 22 years. In the state, the CPI(M)'s fellow travellers, the FB and RSP, with around 10 per cent of votes have traditionally given the front its leading edge over the Congress and now over Trinamool-BJP combine. With seven MPs both the parties have, of late, been showing their dissatisfaction for an overt dominance of the CPI(M) in the Left Front. There are signs that they will not like anymore to be taken for granted by the Front's big brother. However minuscule they may be, they held to ransom their bigger partners, the CPI(M) and CPI, who were keen

to put Sonia Gandhi in Prime Minister's chair in April last.

The CPI(M) softness for Congress is fraught with the fear of anti-Left votes getting entirely deflected to Trinamool Congress and BJP in future. The Left Front in West Bengal already lost some seats in 1998. If Congress vote share slides further from 15.2 per cent, the Left Front is likely to lose more seats in the state. In Kerala, RSP is unwilling to toe the Marxists' pro-Congress line. In Tripura, however, the Marxists are well off as the anti-Left votes there are split between Congress and BJP.

While the communists' prospects are dwindling in their power bastion of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura they are practically in the ghettos elsewhere. The Left last won in Uttar Pradesh in 1991. Tamil Nadu in 1989 and Punjab in 1977. In Punjab, home state of CPI (M) General Secretary H S Surjeet, the Left could not win a single seat in 1998, its vote sharing being a paltry 4.46 per cent. Despite the Left's pro-worker affiliation, in the leading industrial state of Maharashtra it polled less than one per cent vote and no seat. In Bihar and West Bengal, adjacent to the red bastion of West Bengal, the Left secured 3.82 per cent and 1.4 per cent of the votes and no seats. While the communists' fortune is steeply dipping, their bloc Congress tilt will be a fresh liability. In most of the states including West Bengal, the BJP is now poised to occupy the middle ground vacated by the Congress. As a result, the Left is likely to be more vul-

nerable in the electoral politics in future. The Indian Lefts have turned a full circle and reverted to the Dange philosophy of supporting a party on the left of centre so long the party is incapable of projecting or implementing its policy on its own. By promising to support a secular Congress only, if necessary, the Left Front hopes again to gain ground in Indian politics where they are on the wane.

At their ripe age — Basu is 86 and Surjeet 77 — the two patriarchs of Indian Left circuit are no longer dreaming of a working class paradise. They are also not hoping to form a Marxist-led government in India after the 1996 fiasco when the

communists' prospect for leading a government in New Delhi became the brightest. The Congress wanted to support Jyoti Basu who also would have made it to become the country's first communist Prime Minister but for the opposition of the party's powerful central committee. Since then the Indian reds lost much of their bites with few chances of their recovery. Now they only nourish a hope that somehow in some manner an anti-secular, anti-federal and dangerously pro-imperialist BJP will be kept out of power.

The author is retired Brigadier of Bangladesh Army



Rigours of election: Communist party supporters in action