

# Pakistan's Pitfalls Along the Way

It is understandable that Gen Pervez Musharraf and his spokesmen should be going to great lengths to drive home the point that the country had been brought to the brink of collapse and that Pakistan had virtually hit the rock bottom when the army moved in. M.H. Askari explains

UNLIKE in 1977 when there was a violent mass agitation demanding the removal of Bhutto's government, there was no comparable situation confronting the people on October 12. The need is therefore greater for the nation to comprehend and reconcile to the grim reality that resulted from last month's takeover by the army.

It is understandable that Gen Pervez Musharraf and his spokesmen should be going to great lengths to drive home the point that the country had been brought to the brink of collapse and that Pakistan had virtually hit the rock bottom when the army moved in. Gen Musharraf's down-to-earth statements in his interview to the BBC and the plans for likely electoral reforms primarily at the level of the local bodies, as disclosed by his minister for local government and labour in Karachi last week, have not come a day too soon.

However, how the proposed electoral reform package could also be provided with a constitutional cover, since the military government has made no pretence of functioning within a constitutional framework, is not easy to understand. The objective before the army high command for the takeover was primarily to cope with a national emergency - to rescue Pakistan from Mr Nawaz Sharif's devious plans to politicize the higher echelons of the defence set-up, like what he had done to several other state institutions.

On October 12, when Mr Nawaz Sharif's plans entered a critical phase, Gen. Pervez Musharraf had the option to impose martial law. However, he chose not to do so, nor even to abrogate the 1973 Constitu-

tion. Instead, he has since been presiding over the governance of the country largely through executive fiat. He has thus kept himself above the odium of being looked upon as yet another general who decided to overturn the country's constitution.

It can be said that the journey that Gen. Musharraf has embarked upon is neither easy nor free of obstacles. That so far he has not come up against any insurmountable obstacles is mainly because political parties and factions, disgusted with Mr Nawaz Sharif's authoritarian style of government, have chosen to lie low and implicitly endorse the takeover. They could see that the PML government itself was guilty of functioning with a supreme disregard for the letter and spirit of the Constitution and largely in accordance with Mr Nawaz Sharif's whims and caprices.

Hypnotized by his own mantra of a heavy mandate, Nawaz Sharif had concentrated all powers in his hands. He was also all set to convert his position as prime minister into a law unto himself, under the facade of Shariat, through the mechanism of the Fifteenth Constitutional Amendment, which would have reduced the Constitution to farce.

It is important, however, to realize that the objective of ridding the country of "sham democracy" and overcoming the problems of corruption, illiteracy and impoverishment to prepare the ground for democracy in the true sense of the word, which Gen. Pervez Musharraf has set before himself, cannot be achieved overnight. The state to which Pakistan has been reduced has taken all of the 52 years of its existence. It will only be with a long-term sustained effort that

the people would be able to attain the level of maturity to be in a position to exercise their vote more usefully and responsibly.

What sort of an environment will be needed to fill the political vacuum which has been created as a result of the army takeover and which will persist if political activity remains under a freeze is not easy to comprehend. Gen Musharraf has not indicated any time-frame, nor given any idea of the direction in which he plans to take the nation.

With Mr Nawaz Sharif and several other key leaders of the Muslim League incarcerated and with Ms Benazir Bhutto and Altaf Hussain deciding to continue to be in self-exile, there will be for the present no political mobilization worth the name. What is worrying is that in the meantime, fundamentalist forces which do not believe in democratic politics could try to exploit the political vacuum to their advantage. They do not believe in organizing themselves in the customary democratic manner, nor do they have any use for party manifestos for creating a popular base for attempting to get into power.

That many such elements have their roots in a section of society, particularly among the uneducated rural classes, cannot be disregarded. Since they operate largely through mosques and madrassahs, on which the administration has no effective control, they would also put them in a position to attempt to enlarge their base among the people.

The fact is that Ayub Khan had no use for such elements and at one stage even put a ban on the military rank and file on subscribing to the fundamen-

tal ideologies. On the other hand, Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, who also seized power through a military coup, invested a great deal of time and resources in strengthening the fundamentalist forces. In fact, in the initial years, he heavily leaned on them for political support. Inevitably, in one form or another, the fundamentalists managed to gain a foothold in the civil and military bureaucracy and this continues even 12 years after Gen Zia-ul-Haq's death.

Out of the political components of the Pakistan National Alliance which collaborated with Gen. Zia-ul-Haq in his plot to overthrow Bhutto's government, the Jamaat-i-Islami emerged as the strongest, and actually formed part of Gen Zia-ul-Haq's interim government in the initial years. The Jamaat was also strongly supportive of the general's Islamization programme, which drastically changed some of the vital provisions and spirit of the 1973 Constitution.

It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the fundamentalist elements operating through the support that they have gained in the civil and military bureaucracy should want to exploit the present political vacuum and try to neutralize Gen Musharraf's liberalism. (The trend can be seen in the criticism of Gen Musharraf's apparent admiration for Turkey's Kemal Ataturk).

If one were to venture to sound a word of caution, Gen Musharraf and his colleagues have to be extremely watchful of these elements both within the bureaucracy and outside. It may therefore be in the interest of the objectives spelled out by the military regime to give an indication of the direction in

which they would want the country to move. By the same token, some idea of the time-frame within which the objectives are to be achieved should be regarded as very crucial.

One has to remind oneself that from time to time the fundamentalist elements indicated that they plan to convert Pakistani society into an obscurantist entity and to work for the elimination from responsible positions all those whom they look upon as being in favour of some form of secular nationalism in Pakistan. What havoc such tactics can wreak upon society is evident from the sectarian and factional killing which has been going on in the country over the last many years and which has divided society into several antagonistic and warring camps.

The middle class intelligentsia in Pakistan has a tendency to rule out the prospects of the fundamentalist factions from getting into power as, historically, their share of the popular vote in the past general elections has not been very significant. Such thinking can be deceptive because parties and factions believing in obscurantist political philosophies do not have any real commitment to the ballot box for an opportunity to come to power. Instead, they depend upon their rhetoric and their impassioned religious slogans to mobilize public support. One should also not lose sight of the fact that, thanks mainly to Gen Zia-ul-Haq and his Machiavellian methods to stay in power, the fundamentalists are today capable of much greater militancy than was possible in the past.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

# Sonia's Welcome Stance

The Leader of the Opposition in India has lent support to the government's economic reforms, which by itself is a remarkable example of a maturing polity, says Mansoor Mamoon

SONIA Gandhi, the Congress party chief and leader of the opposition in the Indian Lok Sabha has set a welcome trend in the country's politics by lending support to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP-led alliance government in its effort to speed up economic reforms. The assurances came in course of her address at the annual conference of the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce in Delhi on November 20.

The government as well as the investors and business groups have every reason to be happy at the prospects of a possible consensus between the two major players of the country's politics on the badly needed economic reform agenda. This they view as a move in the right direction by the Congress Party Chief for revamping and galvanising India's economy in the new millennium which was the election pledge of the BJP government during the hustings in October.

Many in India were apprehensive that implementation of late Rajiv Gandhi in the much publicised Bofors kickback case immediately on assumption of office by the new government, relations between the Congress and the BJP would turn sour. But Rajiv's widow and heir to party leadership decided to be prudent and pragmatic. She opted for placing economics over politics as she could well understand the mood of the business and investors' community and the urgency for appropriate reforms to catch up with global trends without further loss of time.

The general feeling is that the process of liberalisation and opening up of the India's command economy initiated in early nineties has been abruptly slowed down, due to frequent change of governments at the Centre. Since 1996, there have been two general elections and as many as four change of guards which had adverse effect on the overall economic health of the country. Political instability disturbed the economic stability. The people in general, and the investors and the business section in particular, were the hardest hit. Flow of the direct foreign investment, which appeared quite prospective a couple of years ago, started diminishing as the "flying geese" (meaning the foreign investors) started looking elsewhere.

Indian people, particularly the traders and investors, therefore, thought that there has been too much politicking and the time has come to settle down and devote all energies for the economy to start moving and gain momentum.

Sonia Gandhi could not, hence, afford to take a different course and further isolate the Congress party from the business class. She could well realise that her party which suffered its worst defeat in the recent general elections required to be given a new image to prevent its further marginalisation. The defeat of Dr. Monomohan Singh, called the architect of



economic liberalisation in India, in the polls contributed to the general belief that the electorate have not approved the projection of economic policies of the Congress. This also acted as a deciding factor in Sonia's shifting of party stand on the economic fundamentals to be pursued while in opposition.

These considerations might have prompted Sonia to assure her party's backing of the reform measures to be initiated by the Vajpayee government in the country's economic front. She called for taking corrective steps to achieve the targeted growth rate of six to seven per cent per annum. Pleading for initiating reforms package for self-sustaining faster growth she stressed on building strong infrastructure, redefining the role of the government in every sector and the need for creating social safety net for India's millions of poverty-stricken people by providing them with job opportunities and access to health-care and education.

The reform strategies, about which she hinted, are expected to please the development partners as well as the investors and traders equally. This on the other hand synchronises with the concern for the poorer segments whose case her party supposedly champions.

To the Vajpayee government, Sonia's assurances of backing came as green signal to go ahead with its stipulated reforms programme. It is planning to table a number of bills in the legislature in the coming days like, the Insurance bill, the anti-money laundering bill and other such reformative monetary and fiscal measures. The support of the Congress will no doubt greatly energise the BJP government in its avowed policy

of pushing reforms for activating the economy in a greatly stabilised political environment for which the people were longing for.

Sonia's recent professed support to the BJP government is likely to disturb the Left Front which in the recent past leaned towards the Congress and regarded it as its ally against BJP and its other communal components. When Narasimha Rao opened up India's economy and adopted liberalisation, de-regulation and disinvestment, the Left Front distanced itself from the Congress and charted a third course quite distinct from the two major parties. After the 1996 elections the Left Front and the Congress came closer and chose to support each other. Veteran Marxist and Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu on record to have announced that the Leftists would accept Sonia as the Prime Minister when the BJP and the right-wing parties branded her as an alien and therefore unfit to be the head of the country's government.

Now that Sonia has come up with what will be her party's move vis-a-vis the BJP government's proposed economic reform agenda, the left-leaning political parties are likely to take a posture of maintaining equidistance from both the camps. To Sonia the acceptance of the entrepreneurs, investors and traders appears to be more vital now than that of the leftists in the backdrop of changed realities both in the Indian and the global contexts.

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# Sri Lanka Warms Up

In the run-up to the presidential election in Sri Lanka, the opposition alleges the government to be engaged in violence, reports Deshavimala

THOUGH the thirteen presidential candidates pledged to go for a violence-free election when they gave in nomination, violence started from the previous night in the city of Colombo. Political supporters of a PA politician now in charge of the Borella area backed by the supporters of a Mayor in the Colombo district went on rampage assaulting UNP and JVP supporters who were putting up party posters in the city. Opposite the residence of the Colombo Mayor, armed men in two jeeps assaulted supporters of UNP's Colombo East organiser Milinda Moragoda's supporters who were decorating the streets with the posters of the UNP leader. UNP sources said that the two jeeps belonged to a police station in Colombo and have identified the attackers as policemen. The vehicle numbers have been given to the police under the complaint but, UNP sources said that no action has been taken so far.

In the early hours of nomination day, armed men reported to be supporters of a PA politician in the city along with the supporters of a Mayor stormed the political office of Lalith Front parliamentarian Ravi Karunanayake who joined the UNP and crossed over to the opposition in Parliament the previous week. Karunanayake was appointed as UNP's new organiser for Kotte, the day before he crossed over to the opposition. The attackers sprayed nearly fifty bullets at the office wounding three men who were in the office. Another group of Karunanayake supporters who were putting up posters of Ravi were also set upon by the attackers and the posters re-

moved. On hearing this Karunanayake engaged the services of a video cameraman to video the men who were removing his posters. While the cameraman was in action he was manhandled by another group of PA men who arrived in a jeep and the video camera removed. The next day Karunanayake called a press conference to tell the media about the attack along with UNP General Secretary Gamini Athukorale.

PA parliamentarian Jinadasa Nandasena from Kelaniya was reported to have told his supporters that he was now in charge of the Kelaniya police and has assured ten thousand more votes for the President from Kelaniya. Nandasena fell out with the President a few months ago when the latter reprimanded him for unruly behaviour in the PA. The day after the President announced her intention to go for election she met Nandasena at Temple Trees and Nandasena pledged his support to the President. UNP parliamentarian in Kelaniya Pradeep Hapangama has expressed fear over Nandasena's recent statement that he was in charge of the Kelaniya Police. During the last Western Provincial Council election, the supporters of Nandasena attacked Hapangama's office in Kelaniya and caused extensive damage to the building and wounded some of Hapangama's supporters.

Since the announcement of

the Presidential proclamation calling elections, the private TV stations increased programmes on politics while the state-controlled Rupavahini and ITN too followed suit by interviewing a number of PA government politicians. The private TV stations called both government and opposition politicians for wide ranging interviews. Last Tuesday, Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera summoned the representatives of the private TV stations for a meeting. Mr. Samaraweera was assisted by Special Assignments Minister Dr. Sarath Amunugama at this talks with the private TV men. Dr. Amunugama is an experienced man who has handled the media during the UNP regime and was once the censor. Mr. Samaraweera told the TV representatives that they should not carry out any propaganda work of the presidential candidates and added that no advertisements of the candidates should be allowed on their screens. This decision of the government has annoyed the opposition political parties.

UNP General Secretary Gamini Athukorale who was informed of this move the same day met UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe at the latter's residence in Colombo to apprise him of it. Mr. Wickremesinghe directed Athukorale to issue a statement immediately condemning the action of Mr. Samaraweera. Mr. Athukorale issued a statement the follow-

ing morning warning the government that if they attempted to pressurise the independent media, the UNP would take to the streets on the issue. Political analysts say that the government's decision to pressurise the independent media was a clear violation of the media freedom guaranteed by the constitution. Mr. Samaraweera also told the private TV men that handling election propaganda was the business of the state-controlled TV stations.

UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe who expressed confidence that he would emerge victorious on December 21, made arrangements to kick off his election campaign the day after nomination from Kandy. Having met the party seniors at his Cambridge Terrace office after handing over nominations, Mr. Wickremesinghe proceeded to Kandy the following day. The candidate went full gear with decorations with the people expecting the UNP presidential candidate that afternoon. A massive gathering was present at this meeting where Wickremesinghe spoke of his plans for the nation for the next century. As the UNP leader arrived at the venue a section of the crowd shouted "Sarath Amunugama Drohiya Bangawewa" (Down with Sarath Amunugama the Traitor).

After the meeting the UNP leader met his parliamentarians in the Kandy District along with provincial council-

lors and party members of the local bodies. At this discussion held at a private residence of a confidante of Mr. Wickremesinghe, the MPs pointed out that the defection of Amunugama did not affect the UNP vote base in the district. Wickremesinghe instructed his party men in the district to campaign house to house to ensure his victory. Wickremesinghe returned to Colombo the following morning to meet the media to release his election manifesto which was titled "My Pact with the People". The design and printing of this manifesto was handled by Irwin Weerakody, the man in charge of UNP publicity and propaganda machine. Among the salient features unfolded from the manifesto by Wickremesinghe included his plans to talk with the LTTE and establish an interim administration in the North and East.

The government during the past few days took Wickremesinghe to task gaining political mileage over a reported statement of the UNP leader that if he was elected to power he would give the North and East to Prabhakaran to rule for two years. Wickremesinghe had denied making such a statement but the state media was used by the government continually to attack Wickremesinghe despite his denial. When Wickremesinghe told the media about opening a dialogue with the LTTE if elected to office, the government media machinery was apprised of it. The Media Ministry immediately got into contact with the state-controlled Lake House. The "Daily News" gave Wickremesinghe's statement on talking to the LTTE and linked it with the statement denied by Wickremesinghe that he would give the LTTE leader to rule North and East for two years.

President Kumaratunga who was at loggerheads with the Reggie Ranatunga family for some time extended an invitation to the former Sri Lanka Skipper Arjuna Ranatunga to meet her at Temple Trees. Arjuna was given this message over the telephone. Arjuna was accompanied by his father and his elder brother Prassanna. They arrived at Temple Trees at 6.00 p.m. on schedule but the President was not available. Having spent one hour, the Ranatungas decided to leave when the President arrived. The President wanted to be excused for a while to be present over a satellite TV programme and Arjuna finally met the President around 8.00 p.m. The Ranatungas spoke more on incidents involving cricket where Prassanna had an encounter with the President's Uncle, Wimala Ratnayake, on the election of office bearers to the main cricket body, Prassanna told the President that all activities regarding the cricket body was done in favour of the Nawaloka Dharmadasas and the President said that Minister S. B. Disanayake had never informed her about such links in the incidents. Arjuna chipped into say that in future only those who could speak English will have the chance of playing cricket for the country if the present trend in the Cricket Board was allowed to continue.

UNP defectors Sarath Amunugama and Nanda Mathew met several UNPers at the Election Commissioner's office at Rajagiriya on the day of the nomination when they arrived at the venue in support of the President.

Courtesy: The Island of Sri Lanka

# To Talk or Not to Talk

K. K. Katyal examines the two issues that are giving rise to stalemate in Indo-Pak talks

TO talk or not to talk — that is the question, repeatedly posed here since October 12, when the civilian government was dismissed and the Army took over after a bloodless coup in Pakistan. In the protracted debate that ensued, the issue has been considered from all conceivable angles in public by non-official experts and commentators but there is no unanimity.

Broadly there are two sharply conflicting conclusions. The issue has also been examined in depth by the Government, the foreign policy establishment in particular, though there is an inexplicable coyness about sharing the official viewpoint with the public. The interest in the question is natural, given the relevance to India of the policies and postures of the rulers in Pakistan, especially of the cataclysmic developments there.

Even though there is a case against obsessive concern with Islamabad at policy-making levels, a thorough discussion on the nature of our response to the latest situation in Pakistan is perfectly in order. It is not to be described as unnecessary Pak-centrism. There is no need to take a grim view of the divergence of opinion on the subject in India. The two viewpoints on our approach are now well-known. Wait-and-watch is a common element, but while one section would prefer to let the Pakistanis sort out their affairs first before New Delhi decides to begin the

dialogue, others would like to deal with whoever is in power in Islamabad. The stray comments from the government leaders, from the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, downward reflect this divergence.

The arguments in support of the hard line are as follows: The coup leader, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, apparently has consolidated this position as the Chief Executive but more time is needed to be sure that there is no challenge to his authority. Till then the situation in Pakistan is to be treated as fluid. Both as the Chief of the Army Staff and in his previous capacities, Gen. Musharraf had been driven by compulsive animosity for India. He was the architect (preparations for which were started when the country's Prime Minister, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, was talking peace with India).

He had been actively involved in the Siachen campaigns (as a matter of fact, the Kargil intrusion was intended to cut off Indian troops in Siachen). He was one of the prime organisers of the Taliban. He could not have undergone a major transformation after seizing power and, as such, could not be depended upon for reasonable engagement on the outstanding issues. His public statements and actions in relation to India have been no respite in the hate-India-bash-India attitudes af-

ter the coup. There is nothing to suggest an inclination to create a conducive setting for talks with India.

Some among the hard-liners in India go to the extent of opposing any contact with the usurper of power. This implies continued recognition of the deposed Prime Minister as the legitimate authority. In support, they cite the Commonwealth declaration which condemned the "unconstitutional overthrow of the democratically elected government in Pakistan", emphasised that "no legitimacy should be accorded to the military regime" and called for "restoration of civilian democratic rule without delay". The advocates of the other viewpoint could be conveyed forcefully while not necessarily making it a precondition. This was the position before the coup and there should be no change in it. Had the civilian government not been dismissed and Mr. Nawaz Sharif represented his country at the Commonwealth meeting in Durban, he would have talked to Mr. Vajpayee and would have been told of the breach of trust, as represented

by Kargil, and of continued acts of terrorism by Pakistani agencies in Jammu and Kashmir.

The reality, however unpleasant, is not to be ignored, say the pragmatists. The army will continue to occupy special position even when the civilian set-up is restored. New Delhi will be dealing with it - in one form or the other. A policy of sullen aloofness would not pay. This could only give a free run to the other side to malign India or help Islamabad get away with propaganda ploys, as was the case with Gen. Musharraf's "offer to unilaterally pull back" his troops from the forward positions on the international border. Those speaking on behalf of the military regime in Pakistan complain that India had been active in the campaign against the General at the multilateral fora — that Mr. Vajpayee led the charge at Durban and took the lead in getting the SAARC summit postponed. It is forgotten that, at Durban, the lead was taken by the African leaders and, in the case of SAARC, Bangladesh, as the victim of military adventurism, was far more vocal in expressing concern over the developments in Islamabad. The Pakistani representatives want New Delhi to take a positive line towards the military ruler. Has it occurred to them that he needs to outline his approach to India — in public or privately?

Courtesy: The Hindu of India

# Another Reluctant Gandhi?

The Congress partymen in India have now fixed their eyes on Priyanka Gandhi. M Abdul Hafiz writes

INDIRA Gandhi remained to me a man enamoured with Nehru to be able to come out of his hypnosis and dutifully followed the path charted for her by the illustrious father. But her chosen political heir, Rajiv Gandhi, was evidently a reluctant entrant in public life. And so was Sonia Gandhi, after Rajiv's assassination. It is a different thing that both were later sucked in by the dynasty's magic spell. And they succumbed to an unwritten obligation to bear the burden of Nehru-Gandhi legacy.

Rajiv Gandhi had been an extremely private person enjoying his airline career as a Boeing pilot. It was only after the death of Sanjay Gandhi, his younger brother, in a plane crash in 1980 that an apolitical Rajiv had to be inducted in politics to help a politically embattled "mummy". It was presumed that he would go through a period of political apprenticeship under the vigil of the incumbent prime minister before he would be expected to take a plunge.

But within years he was on the centre stage of the country's politics following the mother's assassination in 1984. Rajiv never looked back and ended up in the thick of India's turbulent politics reinforcing in the process the Nehru-Gandhi legacy. When he was killed in a bomb blast in Sriperumbudur, the temple town near Madras, he had already raised the dynasty's stake in India's politics.

Sonia Gandhi, the shy, introvert and reticent widow of Rajiv Gandhi was still more circumspect in wearing the dynasty's mantle. Amidst violence, betrayal and tragedy she dithered for long seven years before she put her hesitant step in the murky water of India's politics as the Star Campaigner for Congress in 1998 election.

The Congress party's top slot was offered to her as early as in 1991 but she remained frozen in silence for all the years and persistently turned down the persuasions to lead the orphaned Congress. She relented perhaps when she was irresistibly attracted by the mystical aura of the dynasty which broke her resolve to keep away.

But for Sonia, time and circumstances were not on her side. Her foreign origin, inexperience and no less the tarnished

image of the congress itself made her stumble almost at each step. As she formally headed the party in March 1998, the Congressmen were under illusion that now onward the party would be on its triumphant march. Dashing those hopes the Congress suffered its worst electoral defeat in recently held 13th Lokshava election under Sonia's leadership. There are cautious reactions to the failures of the dynasty's reigning queen, but many Congressmen agree in private the Sonia has not quite been able to charge the party's drained batteries. On the other hand there is unanimity that her daughter Priyanka Vadra has indeed electrified the party.

The frustrated partymen have already started to fix their eyes on Priyanka thinking her to be the lone hope for the party now. Several times before the elections persuasions were made to field Priyanka in politics as youth Congress president. Now there are clamours that she should be fielded in one of the two seats that Sonia has won but statutorily required to surrender. The clamour for Priyanka's induction is going to be louder if Sonia surrenders Amethi where the election campaign was real show-stopper for Priyanka. It is here that she displayed what all were lacking in Sonia in spite of the latter's advantageous 'Nehru-Gandhi brand name'.

Not only that, Priyanka does not suffer from a foreign origin stigma — unlike her mother she is fluent in Hindi and could speak even in Amethi's local Awadhi dialect with spontaneous ease. She developed a chemistry with the voters wherever she went and showed unusual warmth in contacts with the people. In dealing with the local officials she displayed the unmistakable body language of a natural boss who could be revered and obeyed.

Priyanka's assets and potentials could not be lost sight could off in party circles. But the party enthusiasts were disappointed when they were recently told by the Congress president that Priyanka was not ready as yet to join politics. Also Priyanka herself has given indications of her reluctance to have a plunge in politics. Before the elections an Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC)

leader met Priyanka to persuade her to not only campaign in the state but also to contest from Lucknow or any other seat of her choice in the state. She remained lake warm and refrained from contesting any seat of tragedies.

She herself, along with her mother, brought back the mutilated body of Rajiv Gandhi from Madras in 1991. Earlier she witnessed the tragic scenes of the uncle Sanjay's death and the grandmother's assassination the memories of which must be haunting her psyche. Moreover, Priyanka is known to be unmovable and someone who cannot be forced to do something against her wishes. Like father, she is also a private person taking more interest in the expert business of Robert Vadra, her husband.

The Congress leaders are however thinking in a different line. They believe that Priyanka has, by participating in the election campaign, got the taste of public adulation. That is a heady brew for anyone who tasted it. Priyanka has already tasted and cannot refuse it in future. No one from Nehru-Gandhi clan ever led the life of a private person. Only time will determine how solid are their calculation.

In the meantime, the Congressmen are pinning their hope on another theory. Many think that neither Sonia Gandhi nor her daughter is averse to Priyanka taking a plunge. But for now, Sonia would like to hold Priyanka card so that nobody in the Congress can write the dynasty off or Sonia's leadership is under immediate threat.

As the tradition suggests Priyanka will one day give in. Can she run away from the magic spell created by her great predecessors from Motilal Nehru to Rajiv Gandhi? As they are enmeshed with the soul and history of India, so is she with the legacy of the dynasty set up by them. Also for Congress, a defeated and crestfallen party, Priyanka remains its only hope of a trust with destiny regardless of whether she is ready or reluctant.

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