

Bangladesh

The political cost of a non-political issue

M ABDUL HAFIZ

WITH the thinking of ideological distance between the Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), two premier political parties of the country - the both had been in desperate search of an appropriate issue that could be turned into major electoral plank. In the past, while the Awami League professed socialist ideas at least in its economic conduct, the BNP what looked upon more as a centrist political party with right wing till. But following the global defeat of socialism as a creed during the beginning of the last decade, the AL had not only jettisoned its socialist baggage, it conveniently assured a holier-than-thou disposition thus ending an ideological polemic in Bangladeshi politics. There exists no significant difference in the parties' perspectives with regard to constitutional issues or nation-building strategies. Both the parties now tread the same path following identical road map. Only during the election they devise some vote-winning plank of course, to be abandoned soon after the election.

late 1970s profitably used religion and India-bashing as its main election plank. However, the role in the Liberation War was the AL's exclusive turf. Later both started encroaching into each other's arena with the AL shedding much of its secular pretensions and also bashing India and the BNP, with prominent freedom fighters in its rank, challenging the AL's monopoly of claim for bringing about the country's independence. Since the last election in 1996, the AL greatly conformed to the BNP's constitutional amendment with regard to religion and seldom-upheld secularism, one of the four state principles propounded by the AL.

With the shifting of these policies the political landscape in Bangladesh transformed a great deal.

The religion has, however, been always a weak point for Bengali Muslims who constitute the overwhelming majority of the country's electorate. Unlike in other parties of the subcontinent where Islam came as the religion of the conquerors it came to Bengal through the great saints and preachers of Islam and remained a potent force ever-since. Even Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman, the nation's founding father, despite his secular predilection had been circumspect in dealing with the religious issues and always avoided a confrontation with religious groups. That perhaps explains why he declared clemency for the clerics many of whom were suspected of collaboration with Pakistan Army.

The BNP was aware of the people's psyche so far as religion was concerned and exploited it to its hilt in garnering support for the party. After the putsch of 1975, the BNP swiftly moved to substitute secularism in the constitution with a new expression that "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah will be the basis of all action."

Although the insertion was motivated more to stirrup the people's sentiment for Islam to the political advantages of the new rulers it worked like magic. The people disgusted with a secular experimentation in the country found BNP to be the champion of Islam. The subsequent electoral successes of BNP stand testimony to the fact.

Even if in a belated efforts the AL decided not to totally allow this fertile ground to BNP and staked a

share in it. The AL's Islam-friendly politics could be noticeable from the mid-'90s when the party was almost a political outcast after being out of power for two decades. Being a secular outfit officially it put on the mantle of Islam in a calculated way. The AL chief Sheikh Hasina herself started making symbolic gestures of religiosity. She made more pilgrimages to Makka and wore more modest dresses frequently holding praying beads in hoc hand.

Even after winning 1996 election the AL leaders continued to appear in the mould of BNP-wallias who invariably started their public speeches in the name of Allah. Notwithstanding these cosmetic changes with regard to Islam the AL remained quite well anchored to its doctrinal adherence to secularism which were discernible only by observant people. But even the AL's symbolism helped it considerably in improving its image as a party - at least not opposed to Islam. And the people across the country gradually started taking lenient views of its past failures.

The events of the last few weeks suggest that the AL in a big turn-around handed back the vote-winning factor of religion to BNP

almost on the platter. On the eve of the election when the political parties was the different segments of the society for their electoral gains the AL has faced the Ulemas, an important social force in a bizarre confrontation which will only dent the party's electoral prospects. The opposition would turn the AL's apathy to the religions groups in a heady mix of virulent blasphemy comparing against the Awami League.

It is not immediately understood if the AL has a strategy of its own to deal with its showdown against the clerics spread all over country, but on the face of it the government actions have so far been foolhardy. The social conflicts over myriad social issues keep raging in any society. But the government seldom becomes a party in it. In present circumstance, apart from weight coming from the citizens groups, the government efforts may not match that of the huge force of Ulemas and their patrons and supporters. At the end of the day the net loss will be that of Awami League in political term.

Hafiz, a retired Brigadier, is former DG of BISS.

Interview

'Heads I win, tails you lose'

Excerpts from former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto's interview to the monthly Herald magazine of Karachi:

Q. What do you think is the basic problem with civil-military relations?

A. The inability of the military to bow before the people's will.

Q. Why is that?

A. The military's view on security and government is at variance with the popular will. Pakistan is a federation but the armed forces distrust provincial units. They are scared of giving up power.

Q. So, what is the solution to this impasse in civil-military relations?

A. Either we have democracy or dictatorship. The military seeks a dictatorship or a controlled democracy to continue with their security agenda. They need the centralised state and a diversion of resources for that security agenda. For the first time, they are realising the difficulty of running the ship of state. I believe the solution lies in democracy and devolution. We should return to the roots of the Quid. He founded Pakistan on the principles of federalism, autonomy and freedom. If we revert to this dream, we might devolve more power but we will be more secure.

Q. How has the army managed to present a discredited image of political figures, including you?

A. I dispute that they have succeeded but I agree that they have tried. There are two factors that explain this. One, political institutions are weak and have poor financial resources and organisational ability. Also, they are unable to communicate freely with the masses. This is because genuine political forces have been continually hunted by the establishment, and when you are constantly hunted, you have little time to organise. Second, because the army does give power to some politicians, it has divided the civilian popular base by holding out to those who cannot win the promise of power without legitimacy.

Q. Did you attempt to rein in the intelligence agencies when you were in power?

A. Yes, I did. For instance, in December 1988, within a week of my forming the government, Brigadier Imitiaz working at the ISI Internal began contacting political parties to overthrow my government. My political adviser at the time, General Babar, moved to have him replaced. The army refused initially, though later Brigadier Imitiaz was removed from the ISI Internal, not from the army itself. So, I tried but they defied me and because of the 8th Amendment, I could not remove any officer myself. We collected proof, in 1989, of ISI elements visiting MNAs for a no-confidence move. We made audio tapes. The head of the MI entered my office and saw the photograph of the man who had been approaching my MNAs. He panicked, took the photograph and the tape and then sent me a report saying the man in question was deranged. In 1990, when the ISI launched a similar effort, we made a videotape called Operation Jackal. A serving army officer, Brigadier Imitiaz, technically not in the ISI but substantively still there, was taped saying: 'the army does not want her, the President does not want her, the Americans don't want her'. He was seeking the support of parliamentarians to oust the government. I gave that tape, substantive proof of treason, to General Beg. He filibustered. Eventually, under pressure, Beg just retired the man whereas he should have been tried for treason. Then, when the no-confidence move failed, I was approached by my MPs in the NWFP who said that General Beg had called them to the GHQ and said, 'We want to get rid of her starting with the NWFP and could you please move a no-confidence vote against her'. So, a destabilising political role has been played by a Chief of Army Staff, by chiefs of intelligence, by the heads of the ISI and the President, at different times.

On March 23, 1989, the army jawans mobbed me in a show of support when I went to the Pakistan Day parade. General Beg panicked. I was used to being mobbed and public adulation. I told him it was all right. The support waned when the intelligence agencies - sometimes the ISI, sometimes the MI, at others the FIT and the FIU and even the corps command - intruded. Poisonous stories were prepared and circulated to the corps commanders and the jawans to put the seeds of hatred in people's hearts. These included false stories of corruption, of Indian

agents, of Jewish agents, of American agents, Sikh lists. Thus, an impression was created that we are corrupt traitors and even our supporters turned against us. Beg was with me till the Intelligence worked on him and convinced him that 'she wants to remove you and replace you with General Imitiaz as COAS'. It was a ridiculous story but he believed it. They told Ghulam Ishaq Khan that, 'If she gets a Senate majority, she'll impeach you and replace you with Yahya Bakhtiar'. They concocted these stories. They went to one of my party leaders and said, 'Get 10 MNAs and we will make you Prime Minister'. A corps commander went to my husband in 1989 and said that they could not salute a woman. 'Let her make you Prime Minister as we have no problems with the PPP'. In 1993, they sent a Middle Eastern prince to tell me the same thing - that Nawaz was going but I should bow out because if I fought, things would be different.

Q. Can you provide further examples of how the military establishment and the intelligence agencies operated to destabilise democracy during your first tenure?

A. I have two witnesses who tell me that they attended two similar meetings arranged by a then serving corps commander during my first term. In these meetings, the corps commander, Nawaz Sharif and Osama bin Laden were present. Osama bin Laden was told that a woman in this position was against Islam so he should give them money to overthrow me. And then Nawaz said that he would bring Islam to Pakistan. Does the public think these things need to be investigated independently or not? No one had heard of Osama bin Laden then. I had not either. He is famous now. In those days he was unknown but he was sitting there interfering in my government. He paid 10 million dollars to finance the no-confidence move against me. At that time, we heard that the money came from Saudi Arabia. I sent a Minister to meet King Fahd. He has been very kind to me and I really like him. He is an urbane, generous and kind man. I told my emissary to remind the king that he had said to me: 'Ali Bhutto was my brother and my friend. I opposed his murder. I thought it was unjust then and I think it is unjust now. You are like my daughter'. Then how come he was sending money to overthrow my government?

He sent back a message saying that the Saudi government was not involved and it was a private Saudi citizen. Later on, from these two individuals who were with the PML then but are with us now, I learnt that the meetings involved Sharif, a then-serving corps commander and Osama and they wheedled 10 million dollars out of Osama to overthrow the government. Meanwhile, my parliamentarians informed me that they were offered a million dollar each by Mr. Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi to get rid of me. I like Mr. Jatoi. He treats me like a daughter and personally I have no problem with him. But I do think Mr. Jatoi and I both owe it to the nation that the facts should come out.

I set up my own Trojan horse. I told the MNAs to go ahead and take the money. 'Let them think you are with them'. That is how they lost the no-confidence motion. My four MNAs were counted against me but they did not crossover and two more joined me. Otherwise they had it all set. And then we had this very funny incident when these four MNAs came to the Prime Minister's House with briefcases of money and said, 'You take it', and I said, 'No, I cannot. In the end, of course, the money was not taken but the fact remains that these sorts of sums were paid for no-confidence votes. And they were not paid by the political parties but by the intelligence agencies and rogue elements in the military as well as right-wing adventurists.

And at the SAF games, Beg sat next to me with a very satisfied smile on his face. When three PML MNAs came and sat next to me, his face fell. 'What are they doing here?' he asked me in panic. I smiled and said they had joined the government. 'Isn't that wonderful?' Beg just looked like a ghost.

And then we were accused of horse-trading and corruption. Thus the intelligence agencies try to create a 'heads I win, tails you lose' situation for the political class. This simply cannot continue.

Sri Lanka

The ideologue of Tiger terror runs to Bobby

LUCIEN RAJAKARANAYAKE in Colombo

IT was the interior of a large mansion full of all the latest modcons one could imagine to have in a home. He was seated in what was the office room that looked more like a control room. Before him on the plush desk was a large console and above it several screens. He could observe almost the entirety of the State of Eelam, on those screens. It was a monitoring device that would even put the experts at the Pentagon into shame.

Seated in this room was Anton Balasingham, who had been nominated by his former leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to be the first leader of Eelam. This was because Prabhakaran was so afraid of peace, finally negotiated by the Norwegians, that he preferred to commit suicide, together with some of his other close aides by taking a capsule of cyanide each. Anton Balasingham, the former ideologue of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, was now its sole leader, having total control over the North and most of the East of the former Sri Lanka.

One of the first things that Balasingham began to do after taking control of Eelam, was to systematically eliminate all those whom he considered to be possible immediate threats to his power, through the revived judicial system of the LTTE, where teenage youth presided over courts and passed judgment and sentence. Those who were less of a threat, were condemned to the Liberation Cells that were in the old underground bunkers of the North.

The next thing that Anton Balasingham, founder and first leader of the Tiger Kingdom did was to build the Pulikottai or Tiger Fortress for himself and Adele, and hold audience in an assembly hall where he sat on the Tiger Throne, made to his special design, with hidden buttons nearby to issue emergency orders whenever necessary. Having seen the battles for control of Elephant Pass in the past, when the fight was on for Eelam, Balasingham gave absolute priority to the building of a special bridge that would span the Peninsula and the mainland, both for logistical purposes and also as a monument to those LTTE cadres that were killed in the battles at Elephant Pass. That was a certain way of keeping his own control over the section of the East of the former Sri Lanka, that the LTTE was able to obtain after the protracted negotiations that led to the creation of the Eelam over which he now reigned.

Balasingham who had given himself the title Pirabala Puliththalaivar - which meant the Great Tiger Leader - had a fascination with monuments, much more than even the late President Premadasa had for clock-towers. From the time he assumed power over all of Eelam he was busy thinking out a variety of monuments that would prevent the great struggle of the LTTE from ever being erased from the minds of the Tamils

who happened to be living in Eelam.

The building of schools for the education of children that the average Tamil citizen wanted so much, was very low in his list of priorities. The monumental bridge at Elephant Pass was designed in the form of a huge suspension bridge, which if there had been enough length would have outdone the Golden Gate Bridge in California.

The people were all herded to the centre of the new Liberation Square in the old Jaffna city, and they all gave a great cheer and sang the praises of the Great Tiger Leader, on cue, while armed members of the elite Tiger Guard stood guard around the leader and other armed members of the Tiger militia stood at vantage points near the crowd watching their every reaction.

Another monument that the Pirabala Puliththalaivar wanted was to mark the eviction of the Muslims from all of Eelam. The manner was discussed at length among the inner circle of the rulers of Eelam, and it was finally decided to have two such monuments. The bigger one in Jaffna itself was to mark the forced eviction of over 50,000 Muslims from the Jaffna peninsula in the early days of the war of separation. The other was to commemorate the driving out of all Muslims from the areas of the East that came within the territory of the new state of Eelam. The Great Tiger Leader overruled the objections of some of his advisors and decided that the major monument in Jaffna should have some aspects of Islamic architecture, to remind history of the great ethnic cleansing the LTTE had achieved. Therefore, it was a monument that had typical Islamic domes and minarets, with some distortions in style. It was a small model of the same monument that was erected at the new Eelam Maidan in Batticaloa, to remind all Muslims of the East that they had no place in Eelam, even though they may speak Tamil.

There was yet another monument that the Great Tiger Leader paid great attention to. It was the monument to remind the Tamil people of the vengeance that the LTTE had wreaked on all those Tamils who actively supported the democratic process. There were some among the architects and designers who suggested that this monument take the form of an ancient Egyptian obelisk.

The Leader would have none of it. He wanted a monument that would show to the people the faces of all those who had been killed by the suicide killers and others assassins of the LTTE.

That was his order. "What if it turns out to be like the wailing wall, and the people keep remembering these people, and wanting a return to that nonsense of democracy?" one of his very close advisors asked. "Damn it, I want the people to

remember them and know what happened to them because of their belief in democracy," replied the Great Tiger Leader, and so it was. The very close advisor who had dared ask that question was brought to Court within a few days and charged with plotting against the plans of the Great Tiger Leader, and condemned to spend the rest of his life in a Liberation Cell, in the nether regions of Eelam.

Anton Balasingham, the Great Tiger Leader and first leader of Tamil Eelam was enjoying the artist's impression of his latest monument to the many child soldiers who were killed in the war of separation. He took a big gulp from the glass of his special Johnnie Walker Blue Label premium whisky that was his favourite drink. It was at this moment of delight that he was shaken by the sound of a blast. The Great Tiger Leader began shivering. Had the conspirators come anywhere near him.

The hand that went to the console to summon his elite guard was cold with sweat. So was his body, bathed in a cold sweat as he woke from his slumber. He groped around, and regained his composure to some extent when he realized that it had only been a dream. Minutes later he was also regretting that it had been a dream and not the real thing.

The friends he lived with had also heard what they said was a small explosion. They inspected the garden outside and said there was nothing to worry. However, the next morning Anton Balasingham, who described himself as the ideologue of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, reported the matter to the British Police, as a possible threat to his life. It was the Police of the same country he had only recently threatened with the most dire consequences if it ever decided to ban the LTTE. He had promised to show what real terrorists could do.

The British Police who carried out a swift investigation, said that Balasingham's fears were caused by the activity of a few nearby vandals, that was a common occurrence and nothing more. Political analysts are now at a loss to understand how this great ideologue who never shuddered at the brutality, violence and terror unleashed by the LTTE for so many years, had suddenly been so frightened by the actions of some vandals. Some question whether this is a ploy for Balasingham to get himself sent back to the relative safety of Sri Lanka or seek refuge status in another country, in the event of the British Government banning the LTTE.

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Kashmir

Opting for peace

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER writes from Mumbai

THE Kashmir imbroglio has engaged our attention for several decades now. When the Maharaja Hari Prasad signed the document of succession we thought the Kashmir question has been settled. We had other more telling reasons as well to think so. The people of Kashmir had, under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah, opposed the Pakistani tribal aggression against Kashmir and had opted for accession with India. But the question was far from settled due to various developments both on our side as well as the Pakistani side.

course they will not), will soon realise that they have no autonomy, much less sovereignty, they were fighting for. The Pakistan occupied Kashmir certainly enjoys less freedom than their Kashmiri counterparts in India. This lesson has never been lost on the Kashmiri Muslims. Thus Pakistan has hardly any moral claim on Kashmir and legal claim is of course under dispute.

The slogan of jihad raised by extremist forces like Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Muhammadi has hardly any religious justification. Firstly, the Holy Qur'an does not use the word Jihad for war. The literal meaning of the word is to strive, to make utmost efforts to fight evil and to control lust and greed and to spread justice.

There is no doubt that the people of valley have strong desire for peace, not for war. What happened in 1989 was a strong reaction to the political situation then prevailing in the valley. It must be said, and this has been pointed out repeatedly, that Indian Government was far from fulfilling the democratic aspirations of the people of Kashmir. The Kashmiris had opted to join India under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah thinking that Indian secular democracy would not only respect their autonomy but would allow full play to their cultural and regional aspirations. It was a dream, which was never fulfilled.

Their autonomy was gradually curtailed and even free democratic elections became impossible. The way Kashmiri chief ministers were sought to be made pliable to the Central Government and dismissed if they refused to do so sent a strong signal to the people of Kashmir. Jag Mohan's behaviour as a governor of Kashmir and Farouq Abdulla's abject surrender to the powers that be at the Centre in 1988 angered the people of Kashmir and they rose to a

man in revolt and raised the slogan of azadi. The tremendous support the people of Kashmir had given to those fighting against Central Government's authoritarianism should have convinced the Central rulers to concede the just demands of the people of Kashmir by removing actual grievances.

Unfortunately, even the V.P. Singh Government misjudged the whole situation and used repression rather than legitimate means to solve the problems of the people of Kashmir. It is true that the sentiments were running very high in 1989 and it was not easy to handle the situation in the valley. But political wisdom required that situation should have been handled with much more caution and repression should have been minimised. The collective strength of the people convinced the young students and other youth in the valley to take to guns. The situation before militancy started in the valley in 1989 has been aptly described by a Pakistani commentator as that of 'no peace, no war'. The Indian authorities, however, as much misjudged the situation as the people of the valley. The people of Kashmir thought Azadi is round the corner and the Indian Government thought it is matter of few thousand para-military forces to crush the people of Kashmir and teach them a lesson. Both erred grievously.

Now after losing more than 60,000 lives the people of Kashmir have realised that militancy cannot bring freedom to them and the Government of India has realised on its part that no amount of repression can crush the spirit of the people of Kashmir to fight for their rights. Both now desire peace and acceptable and honourable solution. That the people of Kashmir are tired of militancy and desire peace is born out by a recent survey done by English

Weekly Kashmir Images. This survey was done after Prime Minister Shri Vajpayee extended the Ramzan peace. According to this survey an overwhelming majority of the Kashmiris i.e. 92% desire peace and welcome extension of peace and 54% of the people interviewed in the valley hoped that peace will pave the way for dialogue. Fifty-six percent of the people want India to talk to Pakistan and 24% prefer a trilateral dialogue. The Survey was done during the Ramadan when Shri Vajpayee declared peace. The authors of the survey say, "Hoping against hope, Kashmiri people have pinned their hopes in Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's cease fire offer. Most of the Muslims who are fasting these days, are all the time praying for peace to dawn on this unfortunate land." The survey claims that every (Kashmiri) woman questioned supported cease-fire. For Zareefa, a school teacher, the very thought of cease fire is great. Peace should prevail for any solution to be worked out. The Pakatan based militants of Lashkar-e-Tayyibya, particularly their leaders, have strong vested interest in maintaining state of war and hence they are trying their best to sabotage cease fire by targeting innocent people. However, that should not at all disillusion us, our efforts to extend cease fire even further should continue. The more militants target innocent people, more they will be alienated from the people of Kashmir. They already have lost considerable support as the survey shows.

If we withdraw cease fire because of these militant attacks, we will be not only disappointing the people of Kashmir but also the whole world. India has gained considerable support by declaring and extending cease fire and it will gain even more prestige by extend-

ing it further. Pakistan will also be compelled to respond to our gesture. Otherwise it will loose all support whatever it has in the international arena.

Some experts have also suggested that if cease fire is followed by suitable political and economic package for people of Kashmir it will greatly help in winning over the Kashmiris. Pakistan by sending relief material for the earth quake stricken people has also shown a good gesture and General Musharraf by talking to Vajpayee on hope has further broken the ice. These are encouraging signs and we must build on these initiatives.

No one suggests that solution to Kashmir problem is imminent. It will take a long time and great patience to even make beginning in right direction. But we on our part should do everything possible to defuse the situation first by taking suitable measures to fulfil democratic aspirations of people of Kashmir to whatever extent we can and by creating conditions for withdrawal of para-military forces from valley and to minimise their presence there. This will be a great gesture on our part in winning over the Kashmiri people. It is only then that we can talk with the Government of Pakistan with confidence. As the people of Kashmir had stood unitedly behind India in 1947 when the Pakistani tribals invaded Kashmir they will stand once again behind India if the Central Government creates conditions of no repression and fulfilment of their democratic aspirations. The Sufi Islam of Kashmir cannot stand militancy for long. Secular democracy suits them more than aggressive fundamentalism.

Nepal

Koirala embroiled in fresh crisis

ZAGLUL A. CHOWDHURY

NEPALESE Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is facing a new problem over his survival and this time centring an alleged corruption charge.

The PM is already fighting the disgruntled leaders and workers within his Nepali Congress (NC) party and some time ago weathered a storm from his own organisation. The continued threat posed by the radical leftists in certain regions of the country under the banner of the "Lal Sena" is keeping the government busy as the security forces are battling the Maoists with both sides suffering occasional casualties. Efforts to make a headway in the dialogue with the radicals so far bore no tangible progress despite contacts between the two sides. The government says it is keen to have talks with the radicals but also vowed to crush them since authorities say the extremists are killing innocent people. But the Maoists reject the charge and say they are struggling to change the present economic and social systems in Nepal. Security forces are often coming under attacks in some places and the government has also tightened security in the areas where influence of the radicals is known to be quite dominant.

The Maoist insurgency is a big problem for the government which says it spares no effort to tackle the situation and claimed recently that frustration and despondency are growing among the extremists. However, there seem to be no let up in the activities of the radicals. Now it is not much the government but Prime Minister Koirala himself is embroiled in a controversy over the leasing of an aircraft amidst allegations that he has personally benefited by the deal. The opposition is so much vociferous over the charge that it blocked the normal proceedings of the parliament for several days demanding the resignation of the PM. An opposition MP was taken to hospital the other day when fighting broke out in parliament as the opposition continued to disrupt the proceedings over the controversial deal.

Rajendra Pandey, a member of the main opposition united Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) was injured inside the house when he was delivered few blows by civil aviation minister Omkar Prasad Sherrestra and the opposition lawmaker was taken to hospital. The fighting followed a noisy pandemonium that resulted when the opposition members surrounded Speaker Tara Nath Ranabatt demanding that the chair take suitable actions against the prime minister for his corruption in the aircraft lease deal. When the Speaker gave permission to the civil aviation minister to make a statement on behalf of the government, Rajendra Pandey prevented him from walking to the rostrum. As the opposition member physically stopped the minister, the former boxed Pandey, who fell down. At this stage, the opposition members from back bench surged forward and fist fighting started between the two sides. Pandey had to

be treated in the hospital while several other members from both sides received minor injuries. In the midst of a near-bedlam condition, the Speaker adjourned the house but the opposition continued shouting and said they would not relent till the prime minister resigns.

Opposition claim that Koirala was involved in a huge financial scam when he signed a lease for a Lauda Air Boeing aircraft for 18 months last year by the national carrier Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC). The parliamentary public accounts committee (PAC) and the commission for investigation of abuse of authority (CIAA) had told the RNAC not to bring in the aircraft. But the government went ahead and the opposition says it is convinced that serious financial foul play was committed in the deal. Several law makers of the ruling party too are critical of the lease of the aircraft and smelt rat. Koirala is understood to be making frantic efforts to placate the recalcitrant members within his party. He is also seeking to cool down the main opposition on the issue. But the move to win over the NCP-UML leaders including general secretary Madhav Nepal and K.P.Oli seem to have failed as both insist that there can be no compromise on the issue unless the PM resigns. Speaker Ranabatt also tried to broker an understanding between the government and the main opposition. The effort was continuing. Koirala has also discussed the matter in the working committee of the ruling party to evolve a strategy to counteract the opposition demand. However, several members of the NC are sceptical on the moves to face the opposition on this issue as they feel the PM's own corruption with the connivance of some of his close aides should not be taken as a government-opposition issue. But Koirala has also good number of backers within the party and may overcome the crisis with their support. The ruling Nepali Congress has 113 members in the 205-member elected parliament. Main opposition NCP-UML has 69 members while the rest are divided among smaller parties.

The government some time ago faced the sensitive opposition campaign centring anti-Indian sentiments when students and people took to streets burning the effigy of Rithik Roshan for his alleged anti-Nepal remarks, which, the actor later denied. There was also an outrage over a comment by a senior BJP leader in India that Nepal should have acceded to India. The campaign later calmed down but an undercurrent of the sentiment persists.

Koirala survived a no-confidence motion earlier in the house. The present crisis is not a hot issue involving the government and the opposition but more relating to the PM himself. However, Koirala is seeking to project this as an opposition bid to castigate the government and rallying round support of the ruling party on this count. It remains to be seen how far he succeeds.