

INDIA

Once bitten twice shy, but power is power

M ABDUL HAFIZ

POLITICS makes strange bed fellows. And when it comes to India's Uttar Pradesh the mismatch can assume a bizarre proportion. Here there is no rules of game. Just clinging to power by any means is the name of the game in the state steeped in multiple line of rivalries. That's what has resulted in Uttar Pradesh after two months' of state assembly election which produced a hung assembly. Even if the incumbent chief minister Rajnath Singh as well as the BJP president of the state unit favoured after the party's defeat in the state to sit in the opposition, the BJP high command in Delhi was desperately trying for the party's symbolic presence in the state's power structure. Although both the chief minister Rajnath and the state's BJP president Kalaraj Misra fell in line with the intervention of Vajpayee who persuaded them to share power with Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) with whom the BJP had alliances twice before, with, of course, unsavoury experiences. As a result the resentment continues to brew in the party and even after an announcement to this effect by BJP President Jana Krishnamurti, both Rajnath Singh and Kalaraj Misra hinted at the review of the decision in the party's parliamentary board, thus casting a shadow of uncertainty over the arrangements made for the present. The resentment among the ordinary workers of both the parties is understandable. The BJP workers have 'still not forgotten the days when despite their party being a partner of Kalyan Singh government in 1997 Megawati and Kanshiram organised 'dhamas' and demon-

stration against the government to the embarrassments of BJP which was dubbed 'anti-dalit.' The bickerings over the caste issue reached a new pitch when after rotational change of chief minister-ship (as agreed upon) brought BJP's Kalyan Singh in office. The BJP chief minister issued a government order to prevent the misuse of scheduled caste and scheduled tribes' (prevention of atrocities) Act, 1989. There were bitter exchanges of allegation and counter allegation with regards to the victimisation of upper caste bureaucrats and Megawati organising as chief minis-

nor having minimum essential ingredient of alliance. Burying that bitter past can the both -- the BJP and BSP, after their experience of each other -- forge a workable alliance? More so, when the differences between the two are wider now? And the terms of the alliances are more humiliating for the BJP this time? Last time there was a rotational arrangement for the Chief minister-ship but now Megawati gets full five years' term. Despite the fact that the BJP was thrice humbled by BSP twice in Uttar Pradesh and once at the centre when it helped topple

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ter 'Melas' to honour the social reformer and dalit leaders like Ramswamy and Shahuji Maharaj. But nothing was more profound than their ideological differences. It came to the open when the ministers of the BSP which had many Muslim supporters expressed resentment when chief minister Kalyan Singh visited make-shift shrine in Ayodha at the site of demolished Babri Mosque. So acrimonious was the BJP-BSP relationship during their earlier phase of power-sharing that they kept insulting and abusing each other even publicly. Ironically all this happened inspite of the best of care exercised by both after Vajpayee blessed the alliance with much fanfare calling it the 'natural' allies'. But in effect, it was neither natural

Vajpayee by voting against him in 1999. Yet, to enter into a humiliating alliance with the same BSP after the BJP's earlier experience of it stems from several factors. Vajpayee's approval of the alliance is undoubtedly pushed by his hope for the support of 14 BSP MPs in the Lokshava when his NDA coalition is under constant threat on Gujarat issue. Moreover, ruling India, for the BJP with its only foothold in Gujarat - only where the party has its own government -- has become a joke. In few other minor states like Himachal Pradesh, Goa and Jharkhand the BJP is at the best the junior partner of its allies. With the Lokshava election only two years away, the UP experiment may be a part of greater efforts by the BJP

stalwarts to extend their power base to more Indian states -- even if symbolically. However the sceptics fear that the party's experience with a mercurial Megawati of BSP in 1995, then 1997 and again in 1999 certainly made the BJP leaders sadder but no wiser. After the BJP has almost been flushed out from Delhi Municipal Corporation (MCD) the party seems to be seized with a paranoia which pushes it even to catch hold of a straw in a sea of despair. Although the state-level BJP in Uttar Pradesh is still against a power sharing deal with BSP the central leaders are pushing it hard fearing that Mulayam Singh Yadav who has the largest number of seats in the assembly (146 seats in 403 house) may push for a new alliance to lay claim on political space of Uttar Pradesh.

Even as the finer details of the renewed BJP-BSP cohabitations are worked out there are problems from as unexpected quarter. The Muslim legislators of the BSP will not be party to it. BSP's senior leader Arif Muhammad Khan resigned from the party protesting against the decision of BJP-BSP coalition government. In addition two Muslim members of the BSP in Rajasthan have also decided to resign. The Muslim MLAs of the BSP plan to abstain from voting for the government.

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SRI LANKA

Is peace process moving in the right direction ?

ZAGLULA CHOWDHURY

RATHER unexpectedly, the positive ambience for a dialogue to settle the complex civil war in the island state of Sri Lanka may be marred because of new complexities introduced in the peace process. Signs are being discernible that the proposed talks between the government and the Tamil militants may suffer setbacks in the form of further delay unless the new hiccups are resolved before they threaten the upcoming dialogue in Thailand agreed by both sides. The Tamil militant leadership has dropped hints that they are somewhat disappointed with certain actions of the government side which may affect the pitch of the dialogue. However, they said the issue is being raised with the Norwegian government, which is brokering the peace between the two sides.

Sri Lankan government and the Tamil militants fighting for a separate homeland in the north have signed a landmark ceasefire agreement some time ago that has brightened the prospects of a negotiated settlement of the vexed civil war that has so far claimed more than 60,000 lives on both sides. Two contending sides did reach truce before as well but it is for the first time that they signed an accord to halt hostilities brokered by the international community and vowed to honour it.

Never before, the ceasefire took a formal shape and raised the kind of expectations that this accord has done. The government forces and the Tamil militants have begun observing the first internationally monitored truce as the country for the first time in the 18-year-old civil war sees a concerted move towards ending the bloody conflict. The island state was bleeding white because of long interecine war.

The accord has not come out of blue as sufficient efforts were undertaken for attaining this situation conducive for a dialogue between the two sides. This follows several positive measures that have helped create a congenial environment for negotiations to end the problem.

The scenario has changed for betterment after a new government came to power following the December 5 parliamentary elections. Among other steps, the government expressed its readiness to lift a ban on the "Tigers" as the militants are known. Prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe gave strong hints that the ban may be lifted. This has been a major development in the island state where the Tamil militants demanding a separate state for them are engaged in a bloody insurgency causing havoc for the country. They entered into a truce with the new government and agreed to honour the ceasefire with all seri-

ousness. The rebels have shown ground for a dialogue to resolve the thorny issue. Indeed, all these augured well for a settlement of the problem through peaceful means despite the fact that the problem is very complex and hard task awaits for both sides even if sincere efforts are made for solution of the civil war. In addition to the Oslo government, the United States and other countries have welcomed the truce between two sides, which has bolstered the

issue as she feels the militants are given too much concessions. Still, the peace process is encouraged since none really affords to be negative to the cessation of hostilities which the people largely want it. The victory of ruling UNP of the prime minister and its allies in the just-concluded local body polls including in prestigious district of Colombo will further encourage the pro-peace quarters in the government. But the militants feel that government's reluctance to

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chances of peace.

Two sides reached truces more than once earlier but the ceasefires seldom worked satisfactorily and consequently they collapsed leading to revival of hostilities. All these were occasional and half-hearted efforts towards peace. But the ambience changed after the prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe's government took over as it pledged before the polls that all avenues would be explored for a resolution of the civil war through dialogue. The win of his party in the elections is seen as a mandate by the electorate to intensify efforts to end the war.

Norwegian government is working to facilitate dialogue for quite some time past and held talks with both sides so that peace is given a chance through negotiations. But its efforts often ran into difficulties. Government side was keen for dialogue but the militants were lukewarm. Consequently, the mission by Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim could make no headway although the attempts were not abandoned. The victory of the opposition in the parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka has improved the climate as the new government is more favourably disposed to the peace process than the previous Peoples Alliance (PA) government of president Chandrika Kumaratunga. True, the president remains in the helm as per the constitution despite the loss of her party in the parliamentary elections as Sri Lanka has a presidential form of democracy which enables the head of state to remain in the position till the term is completed regardless of the outcome of the parliamentary polls. But the government is formed by the party or group enjoying majority in the parliament and it also runs the country while powerful president remains a big factor.

A co-habitation government is working in the country where the prime minister is more keen for peace effort while the president supports the endeavour but is relatively less enthusiastic on the

accept more of their demands is queering the pitch of dialogue. Colombo recently said it would not ask foreign governments to withdraw ban on the Tamil "Tingers" although domestically the government may rescind the

ban. This has angered the militants. Some other view points of the militants before the coming talks are not being met, allege the "Tingers". They said complaints are being lodged to Norway's deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen on government's "unacceptable" attitude. Analysts feel this accusation of the militants may dampen the current good atmosphere.

Evidently, the government is cautious on the "Ban" issue as president Kumaratunga is known to be tough on the issue of withdrawing the ban. However, the prime minister wants to give concessions to the militants while without giving the impression that he is too much lenient. This may cause cracks in the present understanding between two sides. But efforts are continuing to resolve the differences by the mediators. They hope the positive gains will be maintained. Hopefully, both sides will retain these gains and create no hurdles to the path of dialogue for greater interests of all

PAKISTAN

A new star on murky horizon

MB NAQVI writes from Karachi

A new star may have appeared on Pakistan's murky horizon. It is a new and rather shadowy outfit, calling itself as Hizb-i-Alami which has started a new Jihad against a new target: the regime of General Pervez Musharraf who, this Hizb has claimed, to have converted Pakistan into a Darul Harb and Darul Kufr --- the land of oppression and apostacy --- by siding with the Americans in their War against Al-Qaeda and Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Therefore Jihad against it has become mandatory.

This Hizb has claimed responsibility for the bomb blasts in Karachi and Islamabad and the murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl. It has also taken responsibility for various attacks on NWFP targets also. It intends to make more attacks.

Its purpose is to topple the government of General Musharraf. The new organisation is symptomatic of the state of mind of many rightwing religious groups. It is not known who actually leads the new organisation, though a name has been mentioned in a news report of a person who has claimed he belongs to this Hizb: it is Moosa, whoever he is. He has acknowledged that he had been

formerly working with Major General Zahirul Islam Abbasi, though he claims that Abbasi now has a new organisation called Al-Saiqa.

It is obviously an NWFP-based religious terrorist organisation. That is certain. There is no knowing what these people may be up to. There are many possibilities of who these people may be. They could be parts of Al-Qaeda or their friends and

four others had always seemed a little queer and not far above a certain incredulity. In any case, plenty of uncertainties have lately entered into this particular case.

The fact a new terrorist group has emerged to take responsibility that admits to firm enmity to President Musharraf opens the door for speculation. For it the sin for which Musharraf cannot be forgiven is the

ently. This fits in nicely with the regime's preferred explanation for not permitting the Americans to operate freely in NWFP's tribal areas: the regime is under attack from friends of Al-Qaeda and Taliban who enjoy popularity in NWFP, to allow a free hand to the yanks will be a red rag to the bull. Anyhow, it would seem to alter the context of the case against Omar Sheikh.

The fact that Hizb-i-Alami took eight long months and many outrages within Pakistan to make its debut in the press is uncharacteristic of such Jihadi organisations. Unless they take full responsibility for their actions, the purpose of such Jihad can scarcely be served. But none should ignore the fact that there is a great deal of agitation in the minds of the sections that are directly under the influence of headline religious groups who were earlier vociferous in supporting Taliban. Growth of such groups would be natural --- with a readymade rationale, while the speculation about precise motives behind this sudden appearance of the group will go on --- at least for sometime until more facts get known.

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admirers. Since they have claimed responsibility for the murder of the American journalist Daniel Pearl way back in January last, a new light may be thrown on the proceedings of the case against Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh.

There are other reports that this case against Omar Sheikh hitherto pursued, may become infructuous for other reasons as well after the discovery of a quartered body that is suspected of Daniel Pearl. The proceedings against Sheikh and

U-turn he took on Taliban and Osama. The timing of the announcement made by the group cannot be ignored. On the one hand a retrial of the Pearl murder case appears to be in the works, in any case, due to the discovery of the suspected body of the American journalist. On the other, it comes after reports of new differences between the regime and the Americans over allowing the latter to pursue the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and other fugitives in NWFP independ-