

JAPAN

Makiko Tanaka quits the show

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

It was a surprising decision that stunned everyone belonging to Japan's elite political circle. The maverick politician who for more than a year was in the limelight of political discussions for her bold and forceful approach and relentless effort to initiate reforms in ways politics is performed in Japan decided late last week that time has arrived for her to take leave from that self-imposed responsibility. Japan's former Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka last Friday submitted her resignation from the lower house of the Diet, which was later accepted by the house speaker Tamiyuki Watanuki. Since the parliament is not in session now, Tanaka only needed permission from the speaker for her decision to be approved.

Later in the evening, talking briefly to media representatives at her Tokyo residence, the former foreign minister said that a recent decision by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to suspend her party membership for two years made it virtually impossible for her to be effective in political games. She also mentioned she realized voters were not buying her explanation that she was not involved in wrongdoings of which she is being accused by different quarters.

In recent months the reformist image of Tanaka became much tainted as she was getting involved in open row with a group of senior political figures within the LDP as well as country's powerful bureaucracy. This resulted in her dismissal as foreign minister in January. Although

many at that time expressed their sympathy for her, a later revelation of her mishandling of state salary paid to her political aides saw her public approval rating taking a sharp declining trend. Only a few months ago, Makiko, as she is fondly called by her supporters and well-wishers, had often been pointed out as a possible future prime minister. But all that now already seem to be a chapter firmly closed.

Political observers in Japan now believe that like her father she too has become a victim of the so-called "money politics" scandals that have plagued the ruling LDP since early 1970s. On July 24, Tanaka appeared before a parliamentary ethics committee to respond to allegations that she illegally siphoned off part of salaries paid for her state financed political aides. Although she vehemently denied misappropriating public money before the committee, however, she failed to provide convincing explanation when confronted by an opposition lawmaker who presented documents showing that salaries intended for state-funded secretaries were used to pay private aides. As a result, political observers in Japan now believe the reason which might have led Tanaka to decide resigning from the parliament was that she had not been able to clear allegations over the scandal. But many Diet members, on the other hand, pointed out that as public figures have an obligation to make utmost efforts to explain any allegation, Tanaka also should have given an explanation to clear up the allegations against her before resigning.

There is also another contrasting

view that suggests her resignation as having been prompted by prosecutors expanding their scope of investigation of the scandal. The special investigation squad of Tokyo's Public Prosecutor's Office has accepted a criminal complaint accusing Tanaka of committing fraud. This would obviously mean a further digging up of evidences connected with charges that she is now facing.

Whatever might be the reason behind her resignation, people in Japan are already talking about the possible outcome of such a decision by a politician who only a few months ago was seen as a viable alternative to country's old style political leadership who have been largely blamed for deepening the public distrust of politics. As Tanaka has not yet submitted a letter of resignation from the party, some within the ruling block believe that she will make a comeback in the political arena. Others, however, see Tanaka as retiring from politics. But whatever the eventual outcome turns out to be, one thing clear is, her impact in politics would never be the same as it was only a year ago. She too is probably aware of the fact and the idea had found its reflection on yet another view of what steps she might be willing to take in the near future.

A group of Tanaka supporters say she wants to leave the constituency to her son and popular opinion within the LDP also holds that son would win the by-election in a landslide if he runs on the party ticket. It should be noted that a by-election would be held in her Niigata constituency on October 27. Speculation is high among many Tanaka supporters that

her eldest son, Yuichiro, will run.

Meanwhile, the groups of people who are obviously delighted by the news of the departure of Makiko Tanaka from politics are Japan's elite foreign office bureaucrats. For the whole tenure of her nine months as Japan's foreign minister, Tanaka was virtually on a head-on collision with top brasses of foreign office bureaucracy, who utterly disliked her forceful manner in implementing reforms in country's diplomatic policy. Many in the foreign ministry reacted with glee on hearing Tanaka had quit. Commenting on the news of her resignation, a senior foreign ministry official told journalists that he believed Tanaka had dug her own grave. The official also didn't hesitate to add that although he was sure some people would appreciate the role Tanaka played in the process of reform in the ministry, he was also convinced that most of his colleagues in the ministry was still holding a deep grudge for the way she lorded it over them. Other officials termed Tanaka's tenure at the foreign office simply as a period of nightmare and were delighted that the possibility of her return to the foreign office has been sealed off.

By-elections will be held on October 27 simultaneously in six constituencies around Japan. Ironically most of those seats fell vacant as a number of leading political figures had to resign taking responsibility of scandals that they were involved in. As a result, contesters in those parliamentary seats must face voters who are demanding an end to dirty politics.

NORTH KOREA

Confronting the times

SUNEET CHOPRA

WRITING in the second volume of his Reminiscences, Kim Il Sung, the founder of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), says: "For a capitalist money is capital, for a revolutionary the people are the source of his strength. A capitalist builds up a fortune in money, whereas a revolutionary changes and transforms the society by drawing on the efforts of his comrades." Indeed, when I visited the society that he helped liberate from the Japanese in 1945 and which he prevented from falling prey to a savage invasion by the United States between 1950 and 1953, carrying forward a badly mauled peasant country into the era of not only industrialisation but also socialism, I could not help but be drawn to the Korean people who are the heroes of the transformation they have wrought.

My first impression of the DPRK was contradictory. I saw a country with hardly any arable land, not unlike Garhwal in northern India, but endowed with a well-developed industrial base, and even multi-storey dwellings in villages. If I saw sturdy mountain folk trudging along the hilly terrain or ploughing fields with no more than a single ox yoked to the plough, I also saw three-room flats of agricultural workers, spartan but equipped with electricity, water supply, toilets and baths. I saw creches for their babies, hospitals, dental clinics, kindergartens, schools and shops on the communes where one could get most things that were available in Pyongyang stores, not to speak of mechanised farming and

stock-raising. Indeed, I could not help but think of India's agricultural labourers whose children lie in the sun during harvest, with snakes and rats scampering past them as the grain falls under the sickle of their parents.

And here, while the European and North American media declare that people are starving, I see well-fed people in rural communes, on the streets of Pyongyang, in the schools, in the buses and on the underground railway. I do not see pale, depressed faces. And not a beggar is visible anywhere. What is the secret of this paradox? I know there is a food shortage, but what is there gets round to everybody. I know there is a power shortage, but the escalators in the Koryo Hotel (all 47 storeys of it) automatically come to a halt when no one is using them, just as the lifts get switched off in stand-by mode if no one presses the button for a few minutes. The problem has been tackled creatively. Unlike in our own country, plans are implemented, aid gets to the people, and things change for the better in the long run.

How does this happen? From the very beginning of the DPRK's existence as a socialist state, the Korean people have been their own God. A fiercely independent and creative people, they are wedded to an ideology of *juche* or self-reliance. It would be ridiculous to imagine that they have received no help from either the Soviet Union or the present-day China. Indeed they are mindful of it, and the railway carriage that Joseph Stalin presented to the Korean President has the pride of place in the exhibition of state gifts. But they do not make mentors out of those who have helped them, a lesson every country must learn from the Koreans in these days of global give-and-take.

And the Koreans learn from others' experience fast enough. When the Soviet Union collapsed, as early as 1992, the Pyongyang Declaration had been signed by over 70 parties, including the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of

India (Marxist). It was a firm declaration making it clear that none of them subscribed to the view that the end of the Soviet Union was the end of socialism. On the contrary, it was a time for introspection, correction and advance. As, Choi Te Bok, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, pointed out in his report to an international gathering of revolutionary parties, on the 10th anniversary of its publication on April 18, today over 260 parties are signatories to the Declaration, reflecting its basic relevance.

The lessons that Korea had learnt were already spelt out in a talk to senior officials of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party by its General Secretary, Kim Jong Il, on January 3, 1992. The first lesson was that the collapse of socialism and the revival of capitalism in some countries was neither accidental nor merely an external process. It was an abnormal event. Certain mistakes had been committed as these countries were following an uncharted path. But, still, these mistakes had to be pinpointed, analysed and prevented from occurring elsewhere.

The major fault of the Soviet set-up was a failure to involve the masses. They had to be made conscious of the fact of "being masters and displaying their ability as such" in socialist society, rather than handing over their role to a set of party bureaucrats to run society merely in their name. This will not happen automatically. The masses had to be educated, organised and involved in building socialism in a concrete manner. This had been done in the DPRK through the institutions of the system of education, the structure of the Workers' Party and the mass activity of the Korean People's Army, which is essential to defend the state against premeditated attacks by U.S. imperialism.

The success of this is evident in the way in which the Korean people have become an active element in the development of socialism. The

existing sense of sharing with others has been kept up even in urbanised Pyongyang. Group dancing, so much a part of peasant society, is very much a part of the life of the city, with different public dances being held in different squares in the city on different days of the week. Here, young people meet each other and get married. What is more, marriages are enduring, with not many divorces.

Korea has the rare distinction of having defeated fascist Japan in a 21-year war in 1945 and of then proceeding to force the U.S. invaders to sign their first ever "armistice without a victory" (in the words of Mark Clark, the commander of the U.S. forces in Korea) in 1953. And that too, after they suffered more than double the losses they had suffered in the Pacific War against Japan. No wonder, the former Chairman of the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, Omar Nelson Bradley, stated that his country waged "the wrong war at the wrong place, at the wrong time and with the wrong enemy".

That they persist in this shows that imperialism, like the proverbial leopard, will not change its spots. It must be rooted out in our time. The 21st century should not be turned into one of new dark ages. The people of Korea, of Cuba, of Palestine, of China, and of Vietnam, to name only a few, are proof that an enormous fund of human strength is behind socialism even today. And unitedly they offer humanity a future of peace, brotherhood and progress for all, and an end to exploitation and oppression. They reflect the collective stake we all have in a future that generations of humanity have yearned for. The people of Korea are working towards it and have succeeded to a great extent. One can only hope that the zest for sharing collectively what our environment offers us and for investing selflessly in the future of mankind will catch up with other populations around the world as well.

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