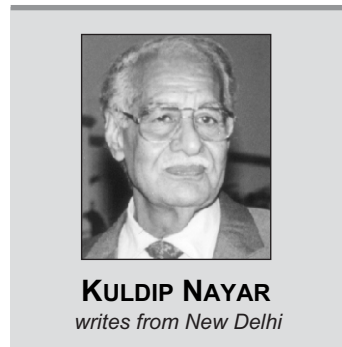


Unite or perish



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

WILL Indian politics take a different turn in 2003? This question has become relevant today because of the BJP's victory in Gujarat, where the contest was between secularism and anti-minority phobia. Bigotry won hands down. Is Gujarat an aberration in an otherwise pluralistic polity? Is it a wake-up call for democracy? Or, is it a proof of the communalism that has seeped into the body politics of the country? The concern on this account is justified in and outside India because its image is that of a secular democratic country.

The problem is the BJP and other members of the Sangh parivar. Their hardcore analysis of the Gujarat election has confirmed their belief that the anti-Muslim agenda was the propelling force in the state polls. Naturally, the party reaffirmed its faith in Hindutva at its executive meeting in Delhi a few days ago. Hostility towards the minorities has become the BJP's creed. It believes that it can replicate the Gujarat model in other states. Godhra is its mascot. The hard-headed want to use the railway bogey's replica in the five states that will be going to the polls later this year.

Whether the Election Commission can stop it as an unfair practice is yet to be seen. A blatant use of communal idiom is banned. The BJP knows this. Maybe, this is the reason why the party has already directed its attack on the commission so as to make it flinch from taking the correct and courageous

stand it has been pursuing so far. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which seems to have taken charge of the BJP's election campaign, as was seen in Gujarat, wants to force the issue. Without waiting for the court's verdict, it threatens to build the temple on the site where the Babri masjid stood before demolition. By vitiating the atmosphere, the VHP believes, it can propagate the Hindutva line.

election 20 months away, does not give it a majority in parliament. The party will have to seek allies to get to the magic figure of 273 in the 545-member house. The presence of the chief ministers from UP, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry in Ahmedabad at the time when Narendra Modi was anointed like a Maharaja gives an idea of the possible tie-ups. Mayawati, a dalit leader, can scare away the upper castes. The Brahmins are already

of Hindutva -- it will increase as the days go by -- may scare away even Mayawati and Jayalalitha, let alone their supporters.

The strategy of the BJP is clear. It proposes to lead another National Democratic Alliance. At the same time, the party wants to beat the drum of Hindutva. As Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani put it, "We want the NDA's agenda in one hand and the BJP's in other."

parties or individuals took away from it enough votes to make the BJP candidates victorious. This is going to be the opposition's dilemma again. Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal are two examples. The Congress will go to any extent to win in these states. If they do not accommodate each other, their incoherent voices will not be able to drown the cry of Hindutva.

The difference between the BJP and the Congress is that the former favours a coalition before the polls, while the latter after the polls. The Congress has a genuine problem. It has a solid base in Andhra Pradesh against the Telugu Desam and against the communists in West Bengal. How does it square it up?

The BJP does not face this sort of problem because it has hardly any support in the states where its allies are strong. In fact, the party's limited support helped, for example, the Telugu Desam to get a majority. That is the reason why Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu supported the BJP-led government at the centre whenever it faced the problem of proving the majority.

The question that neither the Congress nor its non-BJP pponents realise is that the Frankenstein of Hindutva now stalks the land and it is a matter of time that it will devour all secular forces. The primary job is to fight the monster. Perhaps the Congress, the Telugu Desam and the communists and Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party should mend their fences. This may help them to have a joint strategy to fight communalism...

The economic situation and the law and order problem in the country are deteriorating so fast that the BJP will find it increasingly difficult to contain the dissatisfaction. These two points can provide a common platform because the Hindutva appeal is primarily meant to divert people's attention from the real problem of livelihood.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

The question that neither the Congress nor its non-BJP pponents realise is that the Frankenstein of Hindutva now stalks the land and it is a matter of time that it will devour all secular forces. The primary job is to fight the monster. Perhaps the Congress, the Telugu Desam, the communists and Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party should mend their fences. This may help them to have a joint strategy to fight communalism...Hindutva appeal is primarily meant to divert people's attention from the real problem of livelihood.

Therefore, the answer will be provided by the outcome of elections in the five states -- Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi. Nagaland is also having elections this February. But it is not the battleground for Hindutva because the state's population is Christian.

Hindus are in a preponderant majority in all the five states. The Muslim population does not average more than 10 per cent. But if Gujarat, with almost the same percentage of Muslims, could be turned into an anti-Muslim inferno, there is no reason why the same tactics will not be tried elsewhere. The BJP and other members of the Sangh parivar may repeat Gujarat as BJP president Venkaiah Naidu has announced.

That the five states are from the Hindi-speaking region may be a coincidence. But it can set a trend. However, constituted as India is, even a clean sweep by the BJP in all the Hindi-speaking states, including the five, in the general

set against the BJP. Caste politics tends to take precedence over communal politics in India. Again, Jayalalitha's alliance with the BJP does not mean any tangible support. The south, like the east and the northeast, will be averse to the domination of the Hindi-speaking states.

Above all, it is too early to predict whether Mayawati and Jayalalitha would at all join hands with militant Hindu fanaticism. And even if they do, the question of how long the alliance will last would remain. The most important thing is whether their supporters will accept the BJP from their hearts.

Power is a big magnet. If George Fernandes, Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav, once big lights in secular ranks, could jettison their life-long beliefs for a berth in the central cabinet, the Mayawatis and the Jayalalithas could do likewise. But they would not want to be a part of the BJP's furniture as George, Nitish and Sharad have become. Too much strident clam-

The Congress, which should be marshalling anti-Hindutva forces, is still far from active. Whether it is the right party to do the job is secondary. The first is: what is its strategy in the face of the open, blatant Hindutva challenge? The party does not give the feeling that it is fighting for the country's ethos of secularism. It is taking too much time to regain its composure after Gujarat. Somehow, the Congress conveys the impression that it needs nobody, and that all others need the party. True, it is the largest opposition party. But the challenge to secularism is too big for it to take it single-handed. In the absence of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a collective effort should be made to string together all elements believing in our pluralistic society and composite culture. The cause is important, not who is in the limelight.

In Gujarat, the Congress lost 11 seats because the like-minded

Japan's cautious assessing of South Korean election results

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

A human rights lawyer turned politician has successfully overcome the last minute obstacles to snatch victory in the closely contested presidential elections in South Korea last week. Roh Moo Hyun, the candidate of the ruling Millennium Democratic Party, withstood the jarring election eve withdrawal of political support from his coalition partner, Chung Mong Joon, the president of the Korea Football Association. The rift was the outcome of Mr. Roh's critical standing concerning US military presence in South Korea. The election was held at the backdrop of anti-American sentiment running strong throughout the country over the incident of two Korean girls killed by US soldiers. More and more South Koreans are questioning the rationale of extra privilege being offered to the US troops stationed in the country under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). No doubt the anti-American wind helped Roh Moo Hyun to generate enough support to defeat his opponent despite the withdrawal of crucial backing by a powerful political and financial figure of the country.

The 56 year-old human rights activist is to become the youngest elected president of the country when he takes over the presidency at the end of February from the elder statesman of the country, Kim Dae Jung. Koreans, particularly the younger generation, are much hopeful that the president elect would be able to pursue policy that would turn South Korea into a significant player in regional politics conducive to country's present economic strength. But the new leader who till now remains virtually unknown within the greater political arena both home and abroad is bound to face serious challenges. North Korea's nuclear weapons programme as well as Pyongyang's missile exports and strained diplomatic relations with the United States are few among such difficulties.

No doubt the policy makers in North Korea must have felt relieved with the result as the president elect pledged to continue the "Sunshine Policy" of Kim Dae Jung throughout his election campaign. The policy patronises peaceful coexistence in the Korean Peninsula through reconciliation and cooperation, which the South Korean leadership thinks would persuade Pyongyang to reform and become more open to the outside world. The losing candidate, former Prime Minister Lee Hoi Chang of the leading opposition Grand National Party, had always been critical to the policy and called for a hard line standing towards

North Korea. Had he been elected president, it would obviously have meant an end to the "Sunshine Policy" and return to the Cold War mentality. Judging the official position being pursued by Tokyo on North Korean issue it becomes obvious that a victory of the Grand National Party

For Japanese leadership one major question mark about Roh is that he has not yet expressed specific proposals for dealing with Tokyo. Among Japanese officials there are also some who are concerned that Roh, born after World War II, is a member of the South Korean generation that was educated under a decidedly anti-Japanese curriculum. That particular background might prompt the new South Korean leader to enforce a more rigid approach towards Japan on dealing with issues related to Japan's past colonial rule over Korean peninsula.

candidate in South Korea's presidential election would have been a much welcome outcome. The hawkish segment of Japan's top level policy making figures are openly fanning the hostile North Korean wind by using the returned abducted Japanese nationals as pawns in that game. Japan is now worried that the country could be left out of the scenario if North Korea decides for going into dialogue with South Korea in seeking an intermediary for talks with the United States. Under the present framework South Korea, Japan and the United States are maintaining close contact on the issue of their relationships with North Korea and high level delegates of the three countries are periodically exchanging opinion on the vital issue of how to proceed forward for normalising ties with Pyongyang. Japan is also worried that if the new South Korean leadership moves forward to act as an intermediary on talks between Washington and Pyongyang, this would mean drifting further any possibility of the resolution of the abduction issue.

But the president elect of South Korea has also promised to work with Japan and the United States to resolve the issue of weapons of mass destruction, as well as to pursue negotiations toward normal relations between North Korea and the United States and between Japan and North Korea. He has also hinted that he would support the idea of establishing a forum to discuss peace in North East Asia that would involve the United States, China, Japan and Russia. But at the same time there is also growing concern among North Korea analysts in Japan that with the prospect of becoming even more isolated from the international community because of the suspicions concerning its nuclear programme, North Korea can be expected to try to improve the situation through better relations with South Korea. And if the new South Korean leadership falls into that trap, the analysts in Japan also presume that this might lead to a position where Japan probably would find herself isolated on the issue.

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Despite such careful assessment of what the future course of bilateral ties between Japan and South Korea might be, there is also optimism among Japanese analysts that the new South Korean leadership might initiate policies that would herald a new beginning of mutual understanding, as he is free from influence of particular groups or segments. He doesn't seem to have any particular connections with Japanese political and business leaders. As a result, according to Japanese observers, he will start his term with a clean slate. This was also reflected in one of Roh's victory statements where he made it clear that "the past is important, but we must look to the future."

An alternative poverty reduction strategy

Making people the principal authors of their own future

DR. BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

THE government has recently prepared its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) to provide "a well-prioritized national strategy for poverty reduction, human development and gender equality." However, for Bangladesh truly to reduce poverty and promote human development and gender equality, we need an alternative national strategy which will harness the leadership and creative potential of our people -- the most important resource of our country. We propose a people-centred development approach, where people themselves will be the primary actors for eradicating hunger and poverty, and other entities, including the government and non-government organizations, will be in supporting roles.

A people-centred development strategy calls for mobilizing the efforts of the people, their elected local representatives and the central government. For poverty to be eradicated and prosperity achieved, grassroots people -- especially those who live in poverty and are disadvantaged -- must be empowered to take responsibility for their own future. Women must be guaranteed equal opportunity to participate. Local government institutions must empower, mobilize and prepare them to do so. The role of the government in this approach is to deliver good governance and provide essential resources and services for creating an enabling environment so that the people can succeed in becoming the principal authors of their own future. The people-centred development approach obviously requires a paradigm shift -- a shift from the entrenched mentality that development is basically a bureaucratic responsibility.

Why an alternative development strategy?

Many experts, civil society groups and stakeholders are highly critical of the April 2002 draft I-PRSP. They are critical not only of the preparatory process of the document and its ownership, but also of its contents. Even though the consultative process of the draft I-PRSP was hasty and incomplete, the voice of the people came through loud and clear. The recommendations in the draft I-PRSP, however, largely ignore the consensus of the people expressed during those consultations. Consequently, the draft I-PRSP has bundled together a

bottom-up, people-centred consensus with a top-down, traditional programmatic approach that would merely perpetuate the *status quo*.

Weakness of current I-PRSP: Reliance on macro-economic policy

The greatest weakness of the current I-PRSP is that it reaffirms and rests on the belief that proper macroeconomic policies lead to poverty reduction. The assumption of the proposed I-PRSP is that correctly designed macroeconomic fundamentals stimulate strong GDP growth, which contributes to increased employment and in turn to poverty eradication.

investments.

Any poverty reduction strategy must reflect the vision and experience of the people of Bangladesh -- not the vision of a handful of development professionals or donors. The vision that underlies this alternative development strategy is a vision of a well-nourished, well-educated, healthy rural workforce, in control of its own destiny. It is a vision of strong, accountable local democracy with reverence for the rule of law. It is a vision of a peaceful, equitable, secure and primarily rural Bangladeshi people earning far better incomes, while working in harmony and partnership with our

Overcoming gender inequality: Women bear primary responsibility for health, education, nutrition and -- increasingly, family income -- yet are still systematically deprived of their basic rights of equal opportunities for health, education, nutrition and voice in decision making. There must be an increased recognition and investment in the vital and central role of women in the social, economic and political development of Bangladesh.

Strong local democracy: Local government institutions, especially of the lowest echelon, must become the conduits for participatory democracy at the grassroots.

Eradicating poverty in Bangladesh can be achieved -- but only through a radical restructuring of government machinery -- a radical change in the prevailing mindset of the policymakers -- and a radical reallocation of resources in order to make the people themselves the principal authors of their own future. Such a dramatic change requires a vigorous, broad-based participatory dialogue and committed leadership -- leadership with clear vision and daunting courage.

The worldwide experience of the past 30 years has shown this to be false -- increased GDP has not led to significant reduction of poverty. In a society where large sections of the population live in poverty because of entrenched structural problems, this framework is totally inappropriate. Only microeconomic improvements -- that is, only better incomes and enhanced human development for each individual family -- result in broad-based economic progress, which in turn results in broad-based GDP growth.

While it is important that the government creates a sound macroeconomic environment to promote investment and avoid economic chaos, macroeconomic policy in reality has only indirect influence in a poverty reduction strategy. As such, placing major emphasis on macro policies puts the cart before the horse. Achieving a 7 per cent growth rate will not unleash the productivity and creativity of people in poverty. However, unleashing their productivity will definitely achieve a 7 per cent growth rate or better. In other words -- "trickle down", which has not worked in ending hunger and poverty in the past, is not an acceptable strategy for the people of Bangladesh. The alternative strategy must promote "production by the masses" along with mass production through increased

natural environment.

Alternative Strategy

Based on The Hunger Project's long experience of working with the rural people living in poverty and on broad-based consultations with various stakeholders, we propose a 7-point strategy of radical reforms designed to unleash the creativity, productivity and responsibility of the impoverished in Bangladesh, and at the same time to create an enabling environment for ensuring their success.

The proposed strategy, following the ideas of Amartya Sen and others, emphasizes capabilities, entitlements, freedom and rights of individual agencies rather than the traditional approaches that focus primarily on income, growth and economic efficiency. The thrusts of the proposed strategy are as follows:

Unleashing and empowering the people: Experiences from Bangladesh and abroad clearly show that those who are in poverty must be unleashed and empowered and their capabilities enhanced so that they can become the principle authors of their own future in order to end hunger and poverty in a sustainable way. This will obviously require concrete initiatives to motivate and mobilize people and transform their mindsets of dependency and resignation.

They must be the focal point for empowering, mobilizing and transforming people for achieving lives free from hunger and poverty. Government resources, power, authority and accountability must be transferred to locally accountable bodies to expand and meet the entitlements of individuals so that an enabling environment is created for them to succeed. Non-governmental organizations also need to coordinate their work with such local bodies.

Ensuring good governance: Governance is not a sideshow -- it is in reality the anchor of all development activities. An environment that tolerates graft, corruption and hooliganism at all levels of government wastes resources, undermines good governance, and ultimately subverts the democratic process. Governance failures creates a predatory environment and penalizes those with lower means. Furthermore, safe physical environment is a basic human right. Personal safety of individuals and security of their possessions and investments must be ensured and the rule of law established so that all Bangladeshis, especially those in poverty, can pursue their own future without fear or penalty.

Equity and better income opportunities for people in poverty: Income inequality and inequalities of opportunities have been widening in our country over

the years. The rich are getting increasingly richer, and are commanding greater share of our national wealth. Thus, for a poverty reduction strategy to be successful, a larger proportion of national resources must be channeled to people in poverty. They must also be given opportunities to earn more income. This can be achieved by giving them access to more training, reliable and universally available banking services, better flows of information and improved marketing opportunities.

Better health, education and other essential services: Although Bangladesh over the years has improved in the area of human development, the expansion of opportunities for education, health and other social services has not actually translated into an expansion of capabilities and consequently rapid reduction of poverty. This is because of the deterioration of quality coinciding with expansion of facilities. To remedy this, local government institutions must be equipped with the resources, training, authority and accountability to ensure that the priority needs voiced by the people -- better quality health, education and public safety -- can be met and their capabilities expanded.

Better use of existing resources: Self-reliant development requires a shift in mindset away from always looking for more external resources to more appropriate and environmentally sustainable use of indigenous natural resources. Poverty eradication also requires better use of existing physical facilities and resources -- including ports, water resources and infrastructure. A land reform programme must be initiated in order to streamline the ownership and enhance agricultural productivity.

Conclusion

Eradicating poverty in Bangladesh can be achieved -- but only through a radical restructuring of government machinery -- a radical change in the prevailing mindset of the policymakers -- and a radical reallocation of resources in order to make the people themselves the principal authors of their own future. Such a dramatic change requires a vigorous, broad-based participatory dialogue and committed leadership -- leadership with clear vision and daunting courage.

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