

When do ministers have to offer resignations?



POLITICAL pragmatism and constitutional morality are among the factors that lead to ministerial resignations. Ministers are held accountable for any gross failure of public policy that has adverse impact on the citizens. They are required to conduct themselves not only in accordance with the letter of the law but also with the spirit of the Constitution.

Principles involved in resignations

In essence, there are two principles involved in resignations. First is the principle of positive morality which is described as the beliefs that political leaders have to conduct themselves in accountable manner and the second is the principle of critical morality that is expressed in rules that the political actors ought to feel obliged to resign if they have failed to discharge their ministerial responsibility. Ministerial responsibility/accountability is one of the essentials of parliamentary democracy because it manifests account-



The Shell game

LEONARDO MAUGERI

FROM its dawn after World War I, the petroleum age has been haunted by warnings that the world's oil is about to run out. As early as 1919, the head of the U.S. Geological Survey forecast that the end would come in nine years. The spectre of crisis became a source of public hysteria, only to vanish in the global oil glut of the late 1920s. Imaginary crises have come and gone ever since, and the doomsayers are once again sounding alarms, inspired most recently by the news that Royal Dutch Shell overestimated its "proven reserves" by 20 percent.

The world is not running out of oil. Today's doomsayers are followers of American geologist M. King Hubbert, who came up with a predictive model in 1956. He believed that the world's geological structure is well understood, and that geology was enough to predict the rise and fall of an oilfield. He assumed that production would follow a smooth bell curve, so that if one saw signs that a field was peaking, one could also predict that it was about to fall at the same rate at which it rose. Hubbert's 1956 prediction that U.S. oil production in the Lower 48 states would peak in 1972 proved remarkably accurate, and the Hubbert camp was born.

Since then the Hubbertians have been trying to apply his model to the world, failing to see how changing technology, economic forces and new discoveries would make non-sense of his theory. The bell curve would accurately describe production trends in the unusual case of the United States which by '56 was already the most heavily surveyed and tapped oil region in the world but not in most oil states.

The most famous of his followers is another geologist, Colin Campbell, author of "The Coming Oil Crisis," who believes oil production will peak this decade, then fall rapidly, causing price shocks and a scramble for new sources of energy. Campbell claims that decades of exploration with increasingly sophisticated technology make it "inconceivable" that any large oil reserves have been overlooked.

Even the doomsayers see a threat only to "reserves," or the fraction of all oil resources that can be extracted at a reasonable price with existing technologies. To claim reserves as "proven," companies must show that they have a workable plan to get the oil to market. So to predict what share of oil resources will eventually become usable reserves is an insoluble puzzle involving dozens of factors, and geological surveys are only a starting point. Contrary to popular

ability to the people to whom all powers belong (Article 7 of the Bangladesh Constitution). Erskine May's Treaties on Law, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament says: "Ministers have a duty to Parliament to account and be held to account for their policies, decisions and actions of their Ministries-/Departments."

Representative democracy does require that those who have power in the executive (members of gov-

fact that he had been in Italy at the time and hence out of contact with London. US President Truman had a simple message on his desk " the buck stops here". This meant that the President was responsible for any action of his administration, irrespective whether he knew it or not.

President Eisenhower accepted the full responsibility of U-2 spy flight over the Soviet Union in 1960. Although he was advised that he

Situations under which resignations are offered

Furthermore, analysis of past Ministerial resignations broadly indicates three situations:

First, it requires Ministers to resign for personal fault. For instance, last year Murl Manohar Joshi offered his resignation from India's Union Cabinet in the wake of judicial judgment on the demolition of Babri mosque in 1992 and on 10th November Union's Junior

the Cabinet is expected to ensure that all members of the Cabinet are responsible for their departments'/Ministries' actions and if any one breaches this obligation, either the Minister concerned should offer resignation or be dropped from the Cabinet.

In recent times the Parliamentary Committee of the Shipping Ministry of the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) was reported to have criticised the Shipping Ministry for

the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Party. Whether a Minister resigns or not is to be first decided by the Parliamentary Party. . However a resignation seldom occurs unless Prime Minister considers non-resignation of Ministers dwindles political support of the ruling party in the country.

Conclusion

Many political observers believe that modern politics, like modern cricket, has largely left behind its long-held conventions ushering in a new politics of "whatever you can get away with". The great British Parliamentarian Edmund Burke (1729-1797) reminded us of the duties of MPs when he said : " Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment".

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

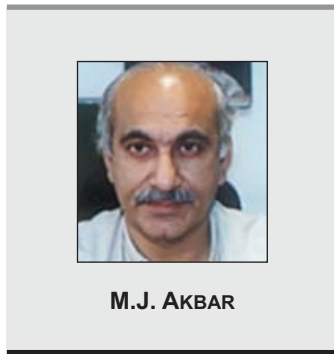
It is remembered only in Bangla

The Bengalis are scattered all over the world. Plow-men and pen-pushers, they are of various kinds. Yet wherever the people speak Bangla, Or wherever the people speak Bangla at home, Or where the children do not speak Bangla, Or where either of the spouses does not speak Bangla, Even there Whenever my mother's face flashes on my mind Or my mother's words come back in my mind Then everything that is remembered Is remembered in Bangla, Is remembered only in Bangla .

(Translated from the original in Bangla)

Muhammad Habibur Rahman is former Chief Justice and head of caretaker government.

Where on earth is the Second Front?



M.J. AKBAR

THERE was something missing in the portrait of worthies that graced the front pages of some newspapers this week, a scene of bonhomie among politicians as distinct as Chandra Shekhar, Sharad Pawar, Somnath Chatterjee, Laloo Prasad Yadav, Amar Singh, Ram Vilas Paswan and Praful Patel. They were guests of Sonia Gandhi at a lunch held to celebrate the spirit of a Third Front, an alliance that seeks to challenge the ruling NDA in the coming general elections.

There was nothing wrong in the variety of creeds of temperaments that they represented, for any coalition must agree on a minimum agenda that involves compromise of many kinds. It was also understandable that the get-together marked a possible agreement rather than an actual one, for all discussions on seat-sharing between these potential allies is going to involve some heavy bloodletting. Mrs Sonia Gandhi's dialogue with Mayawati has already crumbled under the weight of sharp political questions, as for instance who brings what to the table, and who will measure its value. Politics is a meal at which friends are as cool as enemies.

So what was missing at the Third Front luncheon?

A question. Where on earth is the Second Front?

The answer might lie in a proposition. The meaning of Front has changed, just as has the meaning of political alliance.

One origin of the term 'Front' is of course from the lexicon of the two world wars of the last century. Germany launched her campaign in the First World War in the west (thus the classic, All Quiet on the Western Front) and Tsarist Russia opened a second front on Germany's east, against her ally Austria. The second front collapsed along with the Tsars, and the first might have suffered the same fate if Britain had not been able to lure America on to its side with some clever subterfuge. Lenin walked away from the First World War, and concentrated on consolidating the revolution. In the Second World War, the Soviet Union under Stalin was indifferent to a conflict between two enemies of Communism. There was therefore no second front until Hitler decided to invade the Soviet Union. The war for Europe was eventually determined far more by the fluctuating destinies on the second front rather than the first.

In our country, 'Front' came to the fore with the start of the age of coalitions, in the elections of 1967. In Bengal, the United Front was formed in 1967 by a melee of anti-Congress parties and won the Assembly elections. But incompatibility soon wrecked that experiment. (Pranab Mukherjee, who was among the first Congress rebels, could write a book about that experience. He won't. He is still in politics.) The Marxists parted such company to form their own. Led by Jyoti Basu and Promode Dasgupta, they adopted a Leninist approach, that each Front was only a means towards the next step on the way to eventual power for the party and the party alone. To this purpose they cobbled the Left Front in 1977 after the Janata Dal miscalculated its strength in Bengal and refused a deal in the Assembly elections. The important decision that the Marxists took after 1977 was to stop the pursuit of independent power at the expense of its allies. Lenin would

BYLINE

In the coming election, we have the First Front. The picture of smiling leaders at the Sonia Gandhi lunch tells us that there might be a Third Front. But where is the Second Front? It does not exist, because the Congress has vacated this space. The Congress no longer leads any alliance but seeks co-option in a variable alliance. It is an unfortunate position for an organisation that was till yesterday the natural party of governance.

limited agenda. Instead, its leaders were convinced that merger was synonymous with unity. (Chandra Shekhar, who was president of the Janata Dal, could write a book about that experience. He won't. He is still in politics.)

If the various constituents of the Janata had been candid that they held different views, but that such differences should not hold a government to ransom, the experiment would have worked. Instead the Socialists, propelled by the vibrant but mercurial Madhu Limaye, insisted that Jana Sangh (now the BJP) members should not be allowed to retain membership of both the new Janata party and the RSS. Charan Singh, the peasant leader whose sole ideology was to become Prime Minister, cleverly exploited such tensions to break the government. (George Fernandes, whose last-minute switch to Charan Singh in 1979 sealed the split, could write a book about that experience. He won't. He is still in politics.) The self-destruction of the Janata also destroyed the credibility of any 'Front' at the national level for two decades. The Congress sabotage of the governments of Inder Gujral and H.D. Deve Gowda was a further setback to the idea of coalition politics in Delhi.

It is possible that someone in the BJP took some time out to read Lenin. It is probable that they simply took a long look at Bengal and decided that what the Marxists had done was logical. The National Democratic Alliance became the first 'Front' of Delhi that obeyed the parameters set down by the Marxists in Bengal: one central party at the core, with the gumption to leave a sensible amount of space for smaller allies. That space had to be both strategic and tactical. The BJP therefore did not impose its core agenda on its alliance; nor did it seek to elbow out its partners by marginalising them in seat equations.

But to understand what a first or a second or a third front means in electoral politics, we need to return to the analogy of wars. In elections, the First Front is the establishment, or the ruling alliance. The Second Front is the principal Opposition party, either singly or with minor partners. The Third Front is a separate alliance, with a different internal

mix. The Second and Third Fronts are united in one primary cause, a desire to uproot the First Front. They may have nothing else in common, and indeed be hostile to one another in their strongholds. But as in a war, they attack the common enemy from different regions.

When the Congress was in power, the dynamics of the Second and Third Fronts were apparent. You could quibble over ranking, about who was really second and who was third, but there was no confusion that there were two alliances with the common purpose of defeating the Congress. The BJP was the central fact of one front, and some variation of the Janata held together the other, with the Left as a further bulwark. V.P. Singh used the dynamics of two fronts to perfection when he and Arun Nehru took on Rajiv Gandhi in the general elections of 1989 after accusing him of taking bribes in the Bofors gun deal. (The most extraordinary statement I have ever heard is V.P. Singh saying that he never accused Rajiv Gandhi of taking Bofors money. What?! Presumably he gave N. Ram and Arun Shourie Padma Bhushans for not accusing Rajiv Gandhi as well.)

Arun Nehru perfected the strategic positioning of the two fronts against Rajiv Gandhi in 1989. On paper, and in their manifestos, no groups could have been further apart than the Second Front (including the Left), led by V.P. Singh, and the Third Front, propelled by L.K. Advani and the BJP. But they coordinated their offensive to bring down Rajiv Gandhi. From over 400 seats in the eighth Lok Sabha, the Congress crashed to 193 seats in the ninth Lok Sabha. Within the next ten years, the BJP had changed the ranking. It moved to the status of a Second Front, and then in 1999, under Atal Behari Vajpayee it became the ruling alliance and thus the First Front.

So in the coming election, we have the First Front. The picture of smiling leaders at the Sonia Gandhi lunch tells us that there might be a Third Front. But where is the Second Front?

It does not exist, because the Congress has vacated this space. The Congress no longer leads any alliance but seeks co-option in a variable alliance. It is an unfortunate position for an organisation that was till yesterday the natural party of governance. This is why it is not in command of any bargain with any ally in any prominent state.

In Bihar, Laloo Yadav will squeeze the Congress out of reckoning. Mayawati accepted Sonia Gandhi's flowers and birthday cakes, smiled before the cameras and then told her to find her own way through the electoral maze in states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Mulayam Singh Yadav and his allies have told the Congress that it can be granted the status of a supplicant. In Maharashtra, Sharad Pawar will determine the arithmetic. The Marxists have promised the heavens to Sonia Gandhi in Delhi but will not leave a single seat to her in Bengal or Kerala. In Karnataka Deve Gowda is not interested in even a conversation with the Congress. In Tamil Nadu, K. Karunanidhi showed the Congress its place by an arbitrary announcement of seat divisions. The local Congress leaders fumed, and kept quiet. In Gujarat, the Congress does not need allies to humiliate the party; the party's factional satraps are doing that very well. In Andhra Pradesh the Telengana regional party is likely to come to terms with the Congress, but on its terms.

The Congress should have had better judgment about its strengths and weakness, and claimed the space of the Second Front. It is now a ship that has lost its compass.

When you have lost your way, how can you win an election?

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

The case of Shell's missing oil suggests neither Enron-style book-cooking, nor evidence that the oil age is heading for a sudden, cataclysmic end.

belief, oil is not found in great underground lakes or caves. It is trapped in porous subsurface rocks, which makes it very difficult to estimate the extent of any oil "reservoir."

The only sure way to find the bottom of the well is to drill. Far from rising and falling along a bell curve, the estimated size of oilfields tends to increase dramatically but erratically as they are drilled. In the late 1990s the first geological surveys by international oil companies of the mammoth Kashagan field in Kazakhstan estimated reserves at 2 billion to 4 billion barrels. By 2002, after exploratory drilling, the estimates had risen from 9 billion to 13 billion barrels.

Technology is making it easier to find oil. The cost of developing oil resources has declined from an average of \$21 a barrel in 1979-1981 to less than \$6 in 1997-1999. Over the same period, the recovery rate from oilfields has increased from 22 percent to 35 percent. These advances are driving up a key measure of oil's life expectancy: in 1948, the ratio of proven oil reserves to current production rates indicated the reserves would last 20 years; in 2002, that figure stood at about 40 years.

The skeptics respond that oil states are inflating their proven reserves. They note that OPEC states revised these estimates upward in the 1980s, apparently to gain higher quotas within the cartel. But in earlier decades, Western oil companies had dominated Middle East oilfields and had deliberately underestimated reserves in order to justify restraining output, which kept prices high. After states like Saudi Arabia and Iraq nationalised oil, they did raise the estimated size of reserves. This was a correction, not a conspiracy.

Industry critics also complain that most oil-company "discoveries" are in fact upward revisions of existing stocks. But there is no Enron-style book-cooking involved here, either. Proven reserves must be reported under U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission rules, designed mainly to produce accurate information on the value of reserves, not their ultimate size. So constant revisions due to financial variables like price are the norm. All Shell did was to reclassify reserves as "probable" or "possible." At its investors' meeting last week, Shell's top management stated that 85 percent of these downgraded reserves will probably be booked as proven within the next 10 years.

This may raise questions about the value of Shell reserves, its cost efficiency in exploration and the soundness of its internal processes which appear to be responsible for past overbooking. But the reserves still exist.

Industry critics point out that new discoveries replace only one-fourth of the reserves consumed each year. But the real issue is limits on exploration. Over the past 20 years big oil companies have been largely banned from exploring in the Persian Gulf, home of the largest and cheap-

est reserves. The Saudis are pumping oil from nine or 10 of their 80 known fields, while 85 percent of Iraqi production comes from just a few more than 50 discovered fields.

The other obstacle is Wall Street. Analysts figure the long-term price of oil at the theoretical "margin price" of \$16 a barrel, which defies common sense. That's less than half the current market price and so low, it would force economically fragile oil states to cut production. Nonetheless, oil companies must base investment decisions on the

assumption that new oil will return at most \$16 a barrel, or get clobbered by Wall Street.

The real limit on oil supply has nothing to do with scarcity. Just as wood gave way to coal long before forests were exhausted, and coal gave way to oil before the mines ran low, so oil will be overtaken by alternatives that prove more convenient and cost-effective. Already, natural gas is replacing oil in some industries. Yet there is no reason to believe the end will arrive as a sudden, seismic event. Just as the Stone Age did not end for a sudden lack of stones, the oil age will not end for lack of oil.

Maugeri is group senior vice president for corporate strategies and planning for the Italian energy company Eni.

The supply side: Before it's too late

C. J. CAMPBELL

LEONARDO Maugeri belongs to the camp of classical "flat-earth" economists who believe that markets and technology will always solve the problem of limited resources. But we agree on one thing: we are not about to run out of oil. What I think we face is a decline in supply, which is defined by the record of discovery.

It is hard to track exactly what kind of oil has been found around the world, in what quantities, because of loose definitions and reporting practices. The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission demands strict reporting for financial purposes: proved reserves means proved-so-far by current wells or firm development plans, saying little about the full size of the discovery. Naturally, the estimates are revised upward as fields are drilled, giving a misleading impression of "reserve growth." While not globally significant, Shell's recent cut in proven reserves that are not yet in production suggests that companies no longer have a cushion of underreported reserves. Evidently reserve growth is now being countered by reserve erosion.

Many countries report unreliable information. Last year 68 countries reported implausible reserves. Some have remained unchanged for years. Maugeri is right that OPEC countries had reasons to increase reported reserves in the late 1980s, but the key point is that the revisions have to be backdated to the discovery of the fields in order

to build a sound discovery trend.

This corrected trend line shows that world discovery reached a peak in the mid-1960s, and fell below consumption in 1981. We've been in deficit ever since. In 2002 we found about 7 billion barrels but consumed 25 billion. The decline continues despite the use of new technology in a worldwide search encouraged by tax write-offs for most of the cost of

The author of 'The Coming Oil Crisis' defends his doomsday warnings, and issues an urgent call to face the facts.

exploration.

It is also true that some areas have been closed to exploration. The Caspian was one such region, but its contributions turn out to be too small to have much impact on the world total. The Middle East has been partially closed to foreign companies, but most of its oil lies in a few giant fields found long ago. It will take a great deal of time and money to offset the decline of these fields and find new, much smaller ones.

The 1932 peak of discovery in the mainland United States was followed by a corresponding peak in production 40 years later. The pattern is now repeating itself worldwide. Discovery in the North Sea peaked in the 1970s and has now

Campbell is Chairman of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas, a network of European scientists

© 2004, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.