

Turkey's giant leap forward



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THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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A traditional Turkish marketplace: Merchandise for EU!

OCTOBER 6, 2004 will remain a red letter day in the Turkish calendar. On that day in Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU), a report was presented by the Special Commission that Turkey had met most of the criteria demanded by the EU and therefore negotiations could begin between the EU and Turkey in view of her membership of this powerful body. The Commission report will now go before the EU Summit on December 17 next.

It has taken Turkey 40 years to reach the point from where there is no turning back. The President of the Commission Romano Prodi of Italy and Gunter Verheugen of Germany, responsible for the entry of new members within the organisation have laboured for nearly a decade to prepare the countries for membership. The largest circulation daily *Hurriyet* in its front page on the 7th printed photograph of Prodi and Verheugen hugging each other on the successful conclusion of their efforts. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has characterised the report as 'balanced and positive'. Since the preparation of the report has preceded extensive consultations between the two architects of the report and leaders of the 25 members and specially Jacques Chirac of France and Gerhard Schroeder of Germany, it can be expected that Turkey will pass the test on 17 December. Many leaders of the EU are confidently predicting that negotiations will start sometime in the first half of 2005.

Talking to the TV channel CNN-Turk Gunther Verheugen stated, "the start of the negotiations will be the Second Revolution for Turkey. The Revolution of Atatürk was very powerful. Today's Revolution is being backed by a very large majority". He concluded his remarks, "full

membership will take place after 2013".

It is a fact that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk after his victory in his War of Independence against the western occupying powers in 1923 donned the mantle of Great Reformer. During his 15 years of rule, he transformed the Turkish society and gave it a distinct Western face. It is of course true that traditionally Turkey has always looked west and the Ottomans, who came from Central Asia, pushed west. They went there as conquerors and now they are preparing to return as members of the same family.

There is no doubt that there is genuine unease throughout Europe by the prospect of the arrival of Turkey. There are memories of conquest and babies have been nurtured

by lullabies about the arrival of the dreaded Turks. Polls throughout Europe show that the majority of them find it difficult to accept Turkey. After all only a small sliver of Turkey is in Europe and the rest stretches through Asia. There is great deal of ignorance between the Turks and the Europeans and a great effort at trying to know each other is necessary.

In spite of these obstacles that the door appears to have been opened for Turkey, it has been possible for the untiring effort of Prodi and Verheugen and the determination with which the Turkish authorities have faced the problem head on. Some foreign observers have expressed their admiration for the determination of the Turks and the

great unity among them. They have been repeatedly rebuffed but have held on. It is worth noting that Turkey had to fulfil Copenhagen Criteria in order to get the green signal from the EU. In essence the Copenhagen Criteria covers a vast field of reforms in political, social and practically every field of statecraft. The present government led by Erdogan astounded the EU by the speed with which it instituted the reforms.

Of course each successive Turkish government has for the last 40 years remained steadfast in its effort to obtain membership. It is Erdogan's good fortune that he happens to lead the nation at a time when everything seems to be coming to a climax. He has paid tribute to his predecessors for their contribution in this great endeavour. It is also remarkable that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which currently leads the country has the label of Islam. The whole of Europe and particularly France is deeply wedded to secularism as state principle. Among the sweeping reforms of Atatürk the centre piece is secularism. To take a simple example - head scarf is a burning topic in Turkey as in France. AKP will need considerable adjustments as the negotiations begin, hopefully in the middle of next year.

Although EU is composed of 25 sovereign states, France and Germany are truly in the driver's seat. Germany has been an ardent supporter of Turkey all along. There are 3 million Turks who live and work in Germany for several generations. The Ottoman Empire was an ally of Germany in the First World War. France has given the impression of wavering undoubtedly because of the dynamics of her internal politics. What appears to have clinched the matter seems to be the consideration that admission of Turkey would be the most powerful message to the Islamic world. Here is Christian Europe stretching its hand of friendship to Islamic Turkey. Turkey's geo-political situation is also of great interest to Europe. With the emergence of newly independent states in Central Asia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union -- states which are largely Turkic -- Turkey has appeared on the world stage from the periphery of Europe to the centre of great events. That Turkey sits in the heart of Middle Eastern oil, also enters the calculation of EU.

Oktaay Eksi, in a front page editorial in *Hurriyet* wrote feelingly, "It was a day when Great Atatürk should have been with us. The fact that this result has been achieved by conservative and religious personality like Tayyip Erdogan would have made him happier still."

The great journey has begun. It is a date that both Turkey and Europe will remember for a very long time. It seems to me that we have reached a turning point in history.

Arshad-uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.

THE BATTLE FOR MAHARASHTRA Will BJP be the bigger loser?



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

AS campaigning for the Maharashtra Assembly elections ends, opinion polls put the Congress-led Democratic Front ahead of the Shiv Sena-BJP. An *Indian Express*-NDTV poll gives the DF 132 seats (total, 288) and the Sena-BJP 111. A *Telegraph*-STAR poll gives the DF a slender majority (148). But *Aaj Tak*-ORG-Marg forecasts a convincing majority (165-175) for the DF.

Several factors make poll forecasts difficult in Maharashtra. Many rebel candidates are fighting the major parties' official nominees; the contest is regionally uneven, in which Vidarbha could play a "swing" role; and Ms Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party has emerged important while Republican Party factions traditionally supported by Dalits face disarray.

The biggest uncertainty arises from inner-party revolts. The greatest churning is inside the Congress, which split five years ago, leading to the NCP's creation.

Dozens of Congress/NCP candidates who stood second in the 1999 Assembly elections now aspire to tickets. When denied tickets, they contest against the official candidates. *Bandkhors* (rebels) are spoiling the party for the NCP and to an extent, the BJP too.

However, the greatest -- and newest -- loser from the "rebellion" will be the Shiv Sena. In the Sena's succession battle, Mr Bal Thackeray has sided with his son Uddhav against his nephew Raj, the more capable and better-known organiser.

The Raj Thackeray faction, probably working with former Chief Ministers Narayan Rane and Manohar Joshi, will damage the official candidates' chances.

In the past, the Sena supremo would resolve internal differences through his network of patronage. But the network's now in trouble.

Big Money too will shape the contest: About 200 candidates have declared assets worth Rs one to 100 crores! But 54 aren't even registered income-tax payers -- a terrible comment on probity. Half the candidates are no longer bound to any party through campaign-finance arrangements. They act as *individual political entrepreneurs*.

Another issue that'll influence the elections is statehood for Vidarbha (formerly part of the Central Provinces). The Congress is divided over the demand. The BJP is inclined to support it, but the Sena vehemently opposes it.

The BSP alone strongly advocates statehood. This could win it votes in the region where 20 percent of the population is Dalit.

In the Lok Sabha elections, the fast-expanding BSP caused a loss of nine seats to the Congress-NCP in Maharashtra. Now, it could affect 50 Assembly seats. Dalit youth are disillusioned with the warring RPI factions organised around individuals, which ally with other parties as subordinate forces. Many are attracted to Ms Mayawati's *independent* Dalit party strategy, which tilts the balance of power.

The Congress-NCP is working up a high-energy campaign. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Bal Thackeray have been too ill to campaign properly for the BJP-Sena. Mr Advani is no substitute. Nor are BJP state leaders Pramod Mahajan and Gopinath Munde.

By contrast, Ms Sonia Gandhi is attracting large crowds. Along with Mr Sharad Pawar, her campaign will make a difference. But will that overcome the DF's anti-incumbency burden? The Front has failed to provide decent governance and has changed Chief Ministers midstream.

The Congress-NCP could, in a worst-case scenario, lose Maharashtra -- although the Sena-BJP won't get a trumping majority. (It might have to ally with the unreliable BSP.) A Maharashtra defeat will represent a setback for the

Congress and the UPA in general. But it's unlikely to be grave.

Soon after Maharashtra, Assembly elections are due in Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana, which the BJP and its allies are likely to lose. This will more decisively influence the national trend.

The NDA faces a likely rout in Bihar. BJP ally Janata Dal (United), which had 30-odd MPs, is badly depleted. The JD(U)-BJP are no match for the RJD-Congress.

But a defeat in Maharashtra will mean a heavy loss for the BJP-NDA. A power struggle has broken out in the BJP, driven by succession to the first-rung leadership. As Mr Advani recently told the BBC, neither he nor Mr Vajpayee will head any future BJP government at the Centre -- assuming it forms one.

This has spurred the "second-generation" aspirants -- ambitious men and women -- to position themselves to battle one another. They include Messrs M. Venkaiah Naidu, Pramod Mahajan, Arun Jaitley, Rajnath Singh, and Ms Uma

Bharati and Sushma Swaraj. Their factional alignments became apparent during Ms Bharati's *Tiranga Yatra*. Mr Naidu seized the opportunity provided by a court warrant to get rid of Ms Bharati from Madhya Pradesh and did his utmost to marginalise her *yatra*, in which no major BJP leader participated right till the end.

Mr Mahajan too despises Ms Bharati. He has assigned only 15 meetings to her in Maharashtra, while Ms Swaraj got 28. Mr Advani will address 12 rallies. Mr Mahajan's rival, Mr Jaitley, will only get to address five meetings. But Mr Mahajan will speak in 71 places, and his brother-in-law Munde in 60!

This means the power struggle will sharpen *no matter how the BJP performs* at the hustings. Today, no top BJP leader can resolve internal power rivalries. Mr Vajpayee seems to have lost the necessary acumen and political prestige. Mr Advani seems to be in a state of disbelief about the Lok Sabha results.

The RSS has stepped into this vac-

uum with its pet theory -- which many BJP leaders can't convincingly refute -- namely, that the April/May rout was caused by the party's deviation from *Hindutva*.

The BJP is moving towards a harder line -- a reborn Jana Sangh based on raucous, sectarian Hindu-communal politics, narrowly based on the upper castes, which doesn't try to reach out to OBCs and Dalits.

The BJP's Jana Sanghisation is a recipe for its *contraction* into a parochial pressure-group. This will probably get accelerated before the next Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP has lost much of its ground support in UP and Bihar. A defeat in Maharashtra, India's second largest state, will erode the chances of the BJP's revival. The dice are loaded against it.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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