

Say 'no' to hartal

High time primacy is accorded to economy

LIKE many occasions in the past, business leaders have once again urged the political parties to refrain from calling country-wide hartal in the future as a way to bargain with the power that be...

Hartal by all considerations is extremely detrimental to the normal economic activity of the country, as large industries, factories, sea ports, railways, banks, wholesale markets, educational institutes, offices and transports are forcibly shuttered down by the hartal supporters...

The nation has been a witness to many such anarchic situations created in the name of exercising political rights. But, unfortunately the thought had never dawned on the politicians that by forcing one to stay home on a working day they had impinged on the rights of others...

Deaths due to negligence

Somebody must be held to account

A few more of those who suffered from serious acid burn as a result of a collision between an acid laden truck and a passenger bus last week near Comilla have lost their battle, and succumbed to injuries...

What makes the matter more poignant is the fact that most of the 15 that have died were middle class folks, some the only bread earner of the family, and one was a final year student of BUET...

What is most agonising is the fact that all those who died in the accident lost their lives due to gross negligence and callous disregard for public safety on the part of those that were supposed to ensure that hazardous substance are transported in a way that does not cause harm to the people in and around the vicinity of the accident...

We would like to ask, how can anyone, in any position of responsibility, allow a vehicle laden with dangerous chemicals to pass the gates of the factory, or from wherever they commenced their journey? It appears that this was the normal mode of transporting such materials, which has only come to light because of the accident...

It may be mentioned that we see very often trucks carrying iron rods that jut out of the tailboards posing serious danger to other vehicles, or overloaded vehicles weaving through the traffic right in the heart of the capital, looking as if they will collapse any time...

We are not aware whether those responsible for the deaths have been taken into custody as yet. Reportedly, the probe team has submitted its report which has confirmed the fact that hazardous chemical was being carried improperly...

We suggest that the police move quickly to ensure that such accidents do not recur, and that the guilty are hauled up immediately. The guilty must be made to pay adequate compensation to the families of those killed and also for the treatment of the injured...

An exercise in surrealism

PERSPECTIVES



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

IN a troubled time, when the regular political process is in suspended animation, the best bet for the politicians is to lie low and let the storm blow over.

So, those indulgences only vitiate the charged atmosphere and encourage non-political power grabbers to fish in waters already muddied.

Mud-slinging is still their preferred choice in dealing with the opponents, although they ain't in any way relevant to election arrangements.

The real semi-final, in my view, is actually the coming general election. The results of 2009 will set the stage for the revival of one national party as the electorate tires of regional parties...

Informed circles are unanimous in their view that Madam Zia will have to come to terms with hard reality instead of exercising herself in inconsequential surrealism.

We, as a nation, had a roller-coaster journey to our democratic destination, which has so long eluded us repeatedly.

Instead of settling the problems, if any, either with the EC or the government, the alliance is flexing its muscles to take matters to the street...

Understandingly, any shifting of the schedule will be the proverbial last straw on the camel's back as far as public patience is concerned.

In the perception of the four-party alliance, the government has been colluding with AL to catapult the latter to power through a stage-managed election...

Yet, nothing can be further from the truth because, in the present equation, all political outfits are equally treated by the authority.

However, in a tight time-schedule it's doubtful that all of BNP's grudges and grumbling can be looked into -- let alone resolved -- before the year is out.

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with the possibility of a chain of ominous developments. Is the cynical lot of BNP-Jamaat stalwarts consciously taking the responsibility of inadvertently catching the tiger by its tail?

Neither the government nor any other quarter is in any way responsible for the BNP's predicaments -- perhaps, which is why it is shying away from public mandate at this juncture.

To obfuscate the party's terrible ignominy and parry the rationale of an immediate election, Madam Zia may draw comfort from parroting her old rhetoric of "sovereignty in danger" or "country in deep crisis".

Informed circles are unanimous in their view that Madam Zia will



Will she or won't she take part?

have to come to terms with hard reality instead of exercising herself in inconsequential surrealism.

But what she has put at stake for the nation is much more grave, fatal and lethal.

force to reckon with and an enduring factor in our politics. But we cannot let her sabotage the national election, an indispensable pillar of our democracy...

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BLISS.

In the semi-final analysis...

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

THE current assembly elections are not quite the semi-finals that they are being billed to be, for the nationwide electorate will determine the fate of the UPA government, and not just voters in six states.

So where is the prime minister of India during this virtual referendum on his rule? During the first part of the campaign season he was doing bilateral visits in the Gulf.

The fact is that the Congress could not really care anymore whether Dr. Manmohan Singh is in Qatar or Chhattisgarh.

However, Palestinians have higher fertility rates than Israelis, currently 5.4 and 4.2 children per woman in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, respectively...

Without the return of the Palestinian refugees, Israel remains larger in size than the population of the new Palestinian state up through mid-century when both are about the same size.

The second scenario, the "three-state" option, envisions three independent states: Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

However, if the Palestinian refugees from the neighbouring countries are incorporated into the population of the West Bank in the year 2010, then this new Palestinian state would outnumber Israel in 20 years.

The first scenario is simply a continuation of the status quo. Over the entire 40-year projection period, which begins in 2010, Israelis population slightly more than 7 million remains more numerous than the population of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

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nuclear deal, on which he staked his government, over which he broke the alliance with the Left and brought in new allies who purchased MPs on his behalf...

As for remoter parts of India, it is quite remarkable that neither the prime minister nor Ms. Sonia Gandhi campaigned in the 39 Chhattisgarh constituencies that went to polls on November 14.

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The fourth scenario is the "one-state" option, often referred to as the binational option. Under such a scenario, Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would combine into a single democratic state with Arab and Jewish residents holding citizenship and equal rights.

At the time of the new unified state's establishment in 2010, its total population would be nearly 12 million, with the numbers of Arabs and Jews being roughly the same size.

A slight variant of this scenario is for the one-state to be composed of Israel and the West Bank, with the Gaza Strip becoming an independent nation.

The projected demographic trends also suggest that it will be increasingly difficult for Jewish Israelis to maintain their current dominant majority of 78% within Israel.

Given these facts on the ground, Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular

even before the votes were cast? There is a perceptible demoralisation in the Congress, for both administrative and political reasons.

Lalu Prasad Yadav and Sharad Pawar are on opposite sides of the "bhaiyya" war in Mumbai, and ready to say so.

This decline went into fast gear after the Amarnath agitation this year. But reversals need substantive reasons, and there is nothing visible on the horizon that can suddenly turn this tottering cabal in office into a viable instrument of promise.

He writes while Congress flounders.

open. A new ally, Amar Singh, accuses a DMK minister of astonishing corruption in what has become familiar as the "spectrum scandal."

Once again, the prime minister has to pretend ignorance or indifference as unprecedented loot takes place under his watch.

The only remaining strategy for the Congress is to hang on to office, whatever the daily rate of attrition, and hope for some miracle that might revive its fortunes.

It is always possible of course, but we

have no evidence to suggest that the Almighty is partisan.

In an election season, confidence does not evaporate into ether. By some mysterious process, it travels by osmosis into the opposite side.

The most remarkable turnaround has been in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The first was nearly lost; the second was utterly lost.

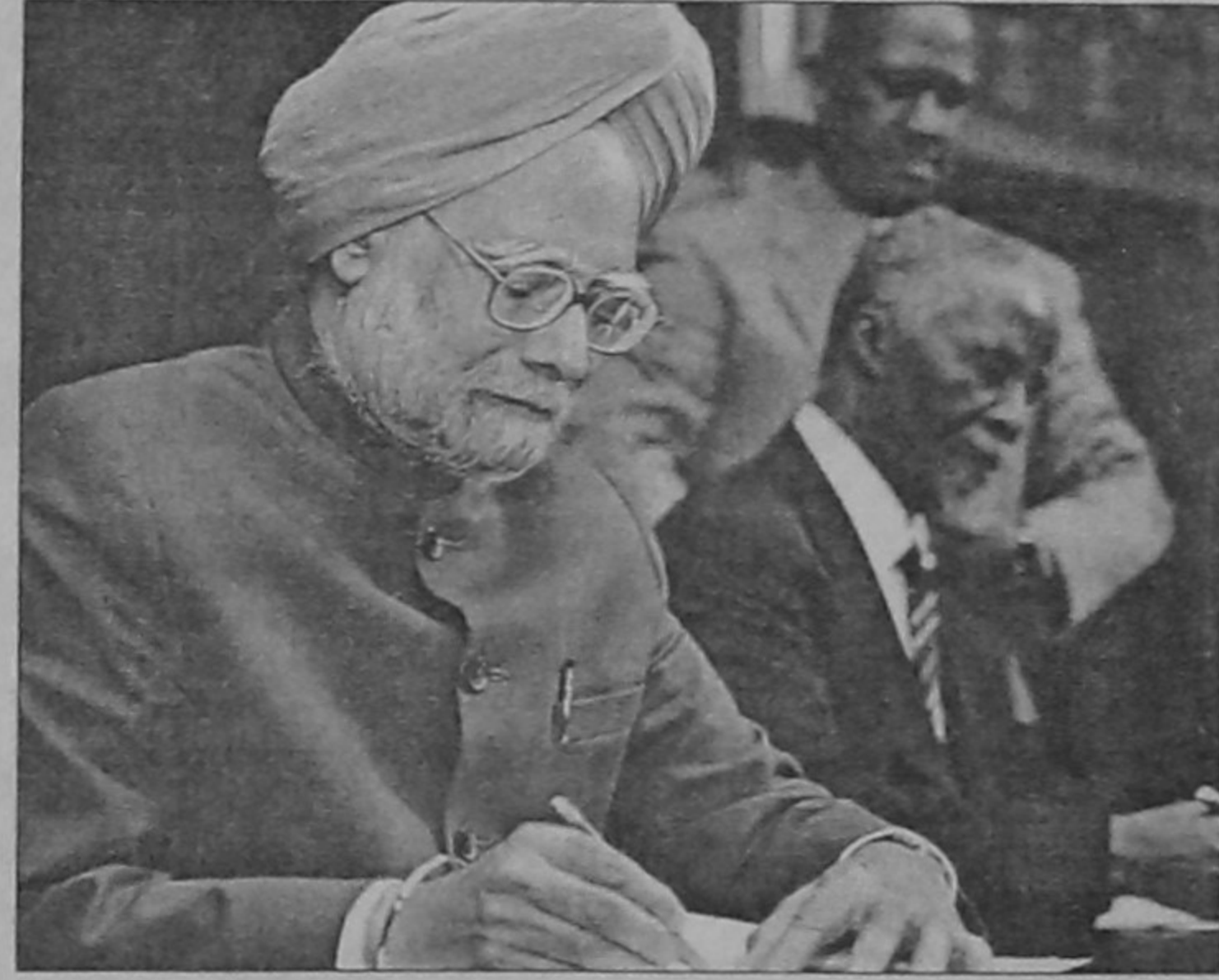
As for the party in play, and could register morale-boosting victories.

Vasundhara Raje has shown exceptional skills, not only in calming political turbulence, but

in also energising two key vote segments, the young and women. Add to this the panache of economic growth, and you have a recipe that an electorate can savour.

The real semi-final, in my view, is actually the coming general election. The results of 2009 will set the stage for the revival of one national party as the electorate tires of regional parties, particularly in the North.

M.J. Akbar is Director of Publications, Covert.



He writes while Congress flounders.

What now in the Middle-East?

With upcoming new administrations both in Israel and the United States and the Palestinian Authority in disarray, the near-term prospects for a comprehensive peace settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians appear remote.

JOSEPH CHAMIE

AS US citizens prepare to usher in a new president and Israel likewise welcomes a new administration, the long-lasting Israeli-Palestinian conflict will again be on the agenda and get a fresh look.

For more than six decades Israelis and Palestinians have struggled within a small tract of land that in total is about the size of Haiti.

the world's population, or about the population size of metropolitan Los Angeles. In addition, the economies of these populations are comparatively small, amounting to less than a third of 1% of world economic output.

With upcoming new administrations both in Israel and the United States and the Palestinian Authority

in disarray, the near-term prospects for a comprehensive peace settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians appear remote.

Despite the daunting challenges posed by the many contentious issues and dispiriting paralysis in the current negotiations, demographics could decide the outcome for the region.

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approximately 55% of the population in 2010 and remain the majority until around 2030; thereafter they would be a decreasing minority.

Perhaps the most obvious observation from this exercise is that whatever scenario, outcome or solution one envisions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it's abundantly clear that demography plays a decisive role.

Consequently, this contested region of the world will become more densely populated than it already is.

The densities for Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip -- today around 350, 450 and 4,300 persons per square kilometre, respectively -- are expected to increase to approximately 500, 1,000 and 12,500 persons per square kilometre by 2050.

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Given these facts on the ground, Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular

those in the West Bank, may eventually decide to push for the right to citizenship and to vote in Israel.

Finally, differential rates of population growth not only redefine the relative standing of Arab-Israelis, Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians, but also impact political calculations, negotiating positions and public opinion.

In the short term, these relatively slow moving changes in human numbers may not be the primary forces behind resolving the conflict.

Given these facts on the ground, Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular