

# Losers and gainers of BDR mutiny



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THERE are many speculations about who gained what from the BDR Mutiny, which fatally claimed the lives of more than seventy people, and also who are to blame at the end of the day. Nevertheless, it is still too early

to draw a conclusion and it is only time that will divulge more truth and facts and figures about the incident. But at this stage, many are calculating from their own partisan or bi-partisan point of views. Let us look at some of these issues.

During the first hours of the mutiny, when the media indiscrim-

inately aired one-sided allegations of corruption of the army officers, it was the army who were to lose its credentials most and that would have left the establishment with shattered confidence within public sphere. It was those first hours when the causes of BDR soldiers were much more focused and

highlighted and many were misled to believe their demands. The government too scored well during those hours checking any military solution to the problem that could pose more dangers. Even opposition parties did well keeping mum, at least without pointing any fingers: a likely case considering our

past experiences.

But things turned around very rapidly within a day. Mass graves were discovered, bodies of slain officers found inside the sewers, and the horrific statements of the atrocities started coming out and the whole scenario began to change all of a sudden. Everyone who supported the causes of the mutiny felt unhesitatingly cheated. Nobody was in a position to support that madness anymore, whatever the causes behind it. The Army at this point regained their public support for their patience and perseverance during those tense hours. People liked their steadfastness to the civilian government and massive public outcries were seen in the scene, showing sympathy to the military officers and their families' agonies. The government who held unanimous supports just a day before faced fierce criticism from the opposition and the army for not allowing the army to storm the BDR compound; it could, as both of them argue, save the lives of the officers. But at this point nobody is talking about the attack they are decrying for it could have claimed many lives, including those of civilians living in close vicinity, the families of soldiers and officers and mostly the innocent BDR Jawans who were bystanders of the incident or forced to take arms, if the army squalled the mutiny place. Nobody is making a point here that if the army went crazy the fatality would have been unimaginable and the BDR soldiers could then have stated that

the slain officers were not killed but victims of friendly fire by their fellow men. The most significant and disastrous one would be the feelings of nearly seventy thousand BDR soldiers that their causes were quelled by force. That kind of reaction could do much more harm to the relationship among BDR soldiers, army officers and the government and could have left a permanent mark.

What happened after all these conundrums is that most of the ranks and files forgot those corruption allegations against the army officers (as public memory is usually short) and most of the BDR Jawans felt that what their fellow colleagues did was a very bad thing. The soldiers are now in the back seat, with lost mental vigor and a feeling of guilt at large. But it could have been a very different reaction if the army went berserk initially.

Therefore, considering the normalization of relationship among many stakeholders of the incident, the government successfully averted a bloody legacy and the army showed its maturity.

Who are the losers then? It is apparently the players who wanted chaos in the country. The sad event shifted many urgent focuses and the government will be busy unearthing the event for the next few months and, in the worst case, for the whole tenure, carrying the legacy of blood and distrust. The relation between the armed forces and the government will take a new shape after this event; this strained relation is not

the best depicted picture foreseen by the fledgling government who just received a sweeping victory on December 29 last year. Among the losers, our opposition is also to be placed who and their like-minded media houses recklessly tried and are still trying to point fingers towards the government for the incident and ignite hatred among military officers against the government for not taking actions promptly. This effort even crossed limits sometimes when a columnist posted an article in a particular right wing newspaper questioning the commandship of the armed forces (for their 'unbelievable' patience)! Their intention is very clear: instigating the army to go angry, lose control and behave irresponsibly against the civilian government. But the army played it very cool showing their incredible professionalism and maturity. So the opposition, considering their diehard efforts, still remains in the losing end.

It is all about losing and gaining, but one irreplaceable thing is that the country has lost some of its most brilliant officers. And, for sometimes, it has been veered into its direction of struggle for economic emancipation. It reminds us that the country must do more to shred the evil networks inside which made it a guinea pig of many outside elements: difficult task indeed.

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## Third Front: A new twist in Indian politics

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

TWO remarkable political events occurred in South Asia in March. One was in Pakistan and the other one in India.

On 12th March, at the meeting of nine left-leaning and regional parties, a Third Front was constituted to give the country another political alternative after the Lok Sabha elections, taking place in April-May. This move was to do away with a two-horse race with the country's oldest political party, the Congress, vying with the Hindu nationalists, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

On 16th March, Prime Minister of Pakistan Gilani conceded to the demands of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to restore (not to reinstate) the top judge of the Supreme Court Iftikhar Chaudhry and his colleagues sacked by President General Musharraf on 3rd of November 2007 when he declared the emergency. This announcement ushered in rule of law and road to democracy in Pakistan.

Politics in India have taken a new shape over the last decade. No more can all-India national parties command influence in all states or obtain majority in the Parliament. They have to form coalition with minor parties to constitute governments in New Delhi. The days of Congress majority government in New Delhi have disappeared as was seen during Indira Gandhi's era.

India is so large with its 1.5 billion people that regional interests override national interests and that is the reason why regional parties, based on caste or state-issues, do well in states. Regional parties are often personality-based and personality clash exists within the states.

Some of the regional parties are like "snakes" that wiggle in or out from New Delhi governments according to the wishes of the leaders of the regional parties. They want to extract maximum "pound of flesh" from national governments for themselves and their supporters.

Both BJP and Congress-led governments in New Delhi have formed coalition governments with nineteen or twenty parties. By forming coalition governments, the major parties have to compromise with their manifestoes to keep their governments united. The current Congress-led UPA (United Progressive Alliance) is a coalition of twenty parties.

The parties making up the Third Front have around 70 seats between them in the 543-member lower house of parliament, most of them belonging to the communists. But they are looking forward to making other smaller parties such as the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), which heads the government in Orissa.

"India needs an alternative to the so-called national parties," Chandrababu Naidu, chief of the Telegu Desam Party, a prominent member of the Third Front, told reporters. "If the Front's numbers are really good then the Congress could be forced to extend support to its government to keep the BJP out," said independent analyst Kuldeep Nayar.

In India, the two-party system has been disappearing fast by a bewildering array of political parties claiming to represent various interest groups in a country of more than one billion people, dozens of regional languages and at least six major religions.

Deve Gowda has spearheaded the loosely-knit coalition, whose most prominent parties are the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), the Telugu Desam Party and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagan representing the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu respectively. Gowda led one of the few non-Congress and non-BJP governments as Prime Minister in 1996, but his tenure lasted less than a year.

The ambitions of regional political leaders have been demonstrated by the fact that some of

them wish to follow Gowda's example to prime ministership. Mayawati, a dalit (untouchable), the Bahujan Samaj Party leader who heads the Uttar Pradesh government, proposes to field her party candidates for 450 seats of parliament.

Mayabati recently hosted a dinner for the leaders of the Third Front and made it clear that she would join it if she was nominated prime minister. Ultimately, she agreed that every party would keep its options open and decide about the leader after the elections. The differences were too many to be resolved. Another female leader Jayalalitha, a former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, also singled her ambition.

Neeraj Chowdhury, columnist for the India Express newspaper, blamed the national parties' downhill slide on their lack of "charismatic pan-India leaders with mass appeal." Their decline could be gauged from the fact that the Congress and BJP are in straight fights only in 8 out of 28 states.

It seems that the smaller parties are expected to play hardball with Congress and BJP. For some years the Congress or BJP has not been able to form governments in New Delhi because the two-party system has disappeared as various smaller parties represent interest groups in a country.

In recent days, CPI-M veteran leader Jyoti Basu expressed that it would be difficult in constituting the Third Front and this has put CPI-M into uncomfortable position with the supporters of Third Front.

Another dimension of Indian politics is the use of religion by Hindu nationalists. There is a political calculation in BJP in dividing Indian people on communal lines for the sake of creating safe vote-banks. It is difficult to create a solid Hindu vote bank for they are divided on caste lines. Varun Gandhi's recent alleged inflammatory communal statement is an instance in point. The alleged statement has disappointed secular-minded people in India and BJP supports Varun's candidate in the election. Investigation is going on to verify the veracity of his statement to which he denied. In recent days, both Prime Minister and the prime ministerial candidate from BJP leader L.K Advani had a war of words against each other on their records.

This is a "replay of the 1990s," said Subhash Agrawal, political analyst and editor of India Focus magazine, referring to the anti-BJP and anti-Congress alliances that take shape every election year. He said poor planning and inflated egos were likely to prevent the Third Front from ever forming a government. "These people don't even want to campaign with each other sometimes," he added.

Only the future will tell whether the optimism generated by the Third Front is justified. That both the Congress and the BJP are mocking its creation shows that they are jittery.

A recent poll by Nielson for the Star News channel predicts a Congress Party is likely to secure the most seats (about 257 seats) in the 543-member of the Lok Sabha but not enough to govern alone. The Third Front could hold the balance of power after the election.

Some political observers say Indian politics is like an onion, with alternating layers of blame and counter-blame going all way from now until the election in April-May. The state of Indian politics reminds us of what Sir Winston Churchill said: "Politics is more dangerous than war, for in war you are killed once."

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### Corrigendum

It was wrongly mentioned in the 28 April issue that George Harrison was an American singer; he was a British singer. We regret the error.

## Obama: Reaching out or burying unilateralism

MUMTAZ IQBAL

OBAMA'S recent eight-day four-country trip is notable more for symbolism than substance. In London, Strasbourg, Prague and Ankara, he emphasised partnership to solve global problems such as recession, nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

This effort reverses Bush's unilateralism and recklessly throwing US weight around epitomized by phrases "axis of evil" and "you are either with us or against us."

Bush was discredited because his bullying failed in the two hot wars he launched in Afghanistan and Iraq. While defeating the enemy militarily, both theatres cost the US big time politically.

Afghanistan is a work-in-progress. Iraq, despite the "surge," was a political disaster. The US financial system's implosion last September was the last straw that saw Bush's approval slip below 30%.

While the financial disaster helped Obama win, he faced the daunting job of righting the US economy. The answer to the problem: prop up demand. Obama approved a stimulus package of \$787 billion, housing reform expenditure of \$275 billion and a plan pledging \$2 trillion to buy up toxic bank loans.

Against this bleak background, the way to tackle the recession saw a difference emerging at the G-20 summit held 2 April in London between the Anglo-Saxons (US/UK) and continental Europeans (France/Germany). The former wanted more spending, the latter comprehensive financial regulation.

The compromise hammered out was for greater regulation of the financial system including hedge funds and credit rating agencies. About \$1.1 trillion would be pumped into the world economy through additional resources to Washington-based and US-influenced IMF (\$850 billion) and IBRD.

Obama's G-20 performance was nuanced and pragmatic, as he summed up at the concluding press conference: "America is a critical actor and leader on the world stage; we exercise our leadership best when listening... recognize... (that) world is complicated... have to act in partnership with other countries... lead by example... show some element of humility... we may not always have the best answer... (but)

always encourage... (and) support the best answer."

This approach ("agree to disagree agreeably") is as different from Bush's unilateralism as chalk is from cheese. For now, US will accept gracefully contributions voluntarily made by its European allies rather than risk a "no" and see a profitless continuation of the transatlantic fractures under Bush.

Nato meeting 3-4 April also saw this pragmatism. Having announced on 26 March that 21,000 more GIs would go to Afghanistan, Obama hoped his Nato allies would emulate. But the Europeans, more interested in exiting from than increasing their Afghan involvement, promised 5,000 soldiers not a small number but only till August 2009 when Kabul holds elections, and another 2,000 troops, but only to train Afghan army and police.



Obama was content with this offer rather than rail as Rumsfeld did about old and new Europe and that EU was getting a free ride at US expense.

The Obama/Medvedev meeting in London on 1 April saw Obama avoid issues like Georgia and Ukraine that raise Russian hackles to reach an agreement whereby Russia and US who between them hold 96% of nuclear weapons reduce their stockpile.

Obama hopes that this spring thaw will stop the "drift" over the

last several years in "the relationship between our two countries."

By doing "our part to move away from the dangers of the world that contains so many nuclear weapons," Obama has reversed the long-standing US nuclear policy of a permanent duopoly and discouraging others from acquiring atomic weaponry.

He hopes this downsizing will placate Iran and other developing countries long-standing complaint about the developed world's nuclear weapons. This won't be easy, certainly not in South Asia and as long as Israel's nuclear status is not clarified.

To the Turkish parliament on 6 April, Obama candidly admitted that the "trust that binds the US and Turkey has been strained," and reached out to Muslims by stressing that the "United States is not, and will never be, at war with

Afghan war now belongs to Obama.

In Prague, on 5 April, Obama criticised Pyongyang's rocket launch and thundered that rules must be observed. Fair enough, but there is an inconsistency here. Washington has blithely backed Israel which habitually ignores UN resolutions. Is the US then going to change its policy towards Tel Aviv?

It may on some tactical issues like West Bank settlements but Israel/US strategic partnership should remain robust. We'll know its robustness soon enough by their divergent or similar reaction and/or response to Iran's nuclear efforts.

Obama undertook extensive public diplomacy to reach European cum global audience. He held town halls in Strasbourg 3 April before Franco-Germans and in Istanbul 7 April with 100

Turkish students. His Prague meeting attracted thousands. Obama's assessment at the end of G-20 summit that his election and early outreach decisions are "starting to see some restoration of America's standing in the world" is reasonable. He has ploughed the land, planted the seeds and watered the soil. The yield depends on the pests and weather, things over which Obama has limited control.

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