

LDP loses by a landslide on agenda of change

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As expected, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost the Japanese elections and as expected very badly. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won 308 seats in a parliament's lower house of 480 seats and sent the LDP into the Opposition, ending its stranglehold on power since 1956, which they had briefly lost for eleven months in 1993. The LDP won 119 seats against the 302 it had in the last parliament.

The figures of the DPJ victory and LDP's defeat are dramatic, a "revolution" according to the DPJ leader and the next Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. But analysts seeking answers to this turn of events in Japan's politics are finding it easy to explain the LDP's defeat. Since the departure of Koizumi, the way his successors led the LDP and Government created voters' disillusionment with the ruling party. The three Prime Ministers, Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda and Taro Aso, who led Japan after Koizumi departed in 2006, failed to match Koizumi's charisma and popularity and by contrast, gave the LDP a very poor image indeed. The emergence of Taro Aso as Prime Minister and leader of the LDP was something that the party did not need with its popularity ebbing fast. Aso is well known in Japanese politics for his non-serious approach to politics and his preference for wining and dining. He made things worse for himself and his party by making frequent gaffes in public to which his colleagues also added with one senior Minister appearing at a press conference while on a foreign trip, drunk.

With the noose tightening round his neck and the party during electioneering, Aso advised poor unemployed Japanese who are the victims of Japan's worst tryst with unemployment in modern times, not to marry. Whatever his intentions were, the advice fell flat on voters and dissuaded them further to move away from the LDP. The economic crunch added to the quota of LDP's misfortunes because by the time election date was announced last month, Japanese voters were yearning for a change.

Indeed, the citizens of Tokyo gave both the LDP and the nation the clear indication of how serious they were for the change. They voted in the Tokyo municipal elections against the LDP that lost its majority in the Tokyo Assembly for the first time in history to the DPJ. In that election, the DPJ won 54 seats against LDP's 38 seats, thus setting for the nation's voters the direction for the Lower House elections. The pre-election scenario created the environment

where predicting that the DPJ would win handily was almost a foregone conclusion.

The seeds of this defeat were however sown much earlier, during the tenure of Junichiro Koizumi. As leader of the LDP, he led the party in his own style that was in sharp contrast to how his predecessors led the party. Koizumi broke the factions in the party that did almost everything, from management of conflicts to naming the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. During his term, he took all the major decisions. His charisma and personality allowed him to dominate not just in the party but also in the nation. Unfortunately, he did not groom his successor and he destroyed the old party structure without putting into place a new order. Although the factions that were dormant while he was in power returned with his exit, they failed to dominate and manage party politics as they did before. This was quite visible in the way LDP led the government after his departure, unsure about major policy decisions that did not fail to attract and frustrate the nation. The fact that three prime ministers came one after another since Koizumi left in 2006 in the backdrop of major policy debacles hinted early enough that LDP was on its way out.

Voters' disillusionment with the LDP was thus the major factor for the DPJ's win. The winner ensured that this victory would be a big margin by appealing to the ordinary people for votes. In a time of economic crunch, the worst for decades, the DPJ promised the voters to make governance focus more on consumers instead of big businesses that the LDP favoured. Among other promises the DPJ made, the one not to raise consumption tax for the next four years was most appealing. The party also promised to lower fuel tax and corporate tax for small businesses. The DPJ also promised to expand on the welfare state despite rising costs in view of Japan's aging population. The DPJ assured voters that it would be able to meet the costs for its promises by budgetary controls and reducing the size of the bureaucracy. In other words, the DPJ promised to be a pro-people government if elected and the people of Japan believed them and that too, overwhelmingly.

In foreign affairs, the DPJ promised to make Japan less dependent on USA and make extra efforts to improve relations with her Asian neighbours. The US air force base in Okinawa that the islanders want relocated could come up immediately for renegotiation. The DPJ, that opposed the Iraq war, also has reservations on presence of 50,000 US troops in Japan. The White House, however, issued a statement that it hopes that the strong US-Japan alliance and



the close partnership between our two countries will flourish under the leadership of the next government.

The LDP's historic defeat has introduced some positive elements in Japan's politics. Parliamentary democracy works best when there is a strong opposition, something that was lacking in Japan. Henceforth Japan will be a two party democracy where the LDP will bring into the opposition their 54 years experience in governance. The new parliament will also see 158 newcomers, the largest new faces ever elected in any of Japan's previous elections. Of these, 54 are women, mostly from the DPJ, which is also a new record. Best of all, Japan will have a new Prime Minister riding the wave of a massive victory that should give him the confidence that was lacking in the last three LDP Ministers. Yukio Hatoyama, grandson of former Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama, and coming from a family called "Japan's Kennedy family" may not have experience in governance

but has enough in politics to lead Japan at this critical juncture when its economy is in the most serious crunch for many decades.

The excellent Bangladesh-Japan relation where Japan is our most important development partner has been nurtured by LDP leadership led by Prime Minister Kakei Tanaka that was deeply touched by our sacrifices and success in the war of liberation. Over the years, legendary LDP leaders like Kayakawa, helped build a relationship where we owe to Japan a great deal for the development of our economic and human resources infrastructure. The DPJ's views on Bangladesh or countries such as ours are yet unknown but there is no reason why the new government would not follow and build upon what it has inherited from the LDP Government. On our part, we would need to make our best efforts to establish early contacts with the new political leadership. Our Foreign Ministry and Mission in Tokyo will now have to carry the extra burden where arrange-

ment of high level visits from our side at the level of the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister should be pursued in all earnestness.

We have benefited tremendously from Japan's economic assistance. We have, however, failed in an area where Japan could be even more useful to us. We have badly failed in targeting and getting Japanese investment. We have all it takes to attract Japanese investment; excellent location as the bridge between South and Southeast Asia; a very large population for supply of both labour and market incentives, etc. Our failure has been in our investment regime that we have boasted as most attractive but one that has fallen far short of Japanese expectations. Let a new era of Bangladesh-Japan begin with the DPJ in power where our main focus would be to make Japanese investment a prime focus of our relations.

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Peace eludes South Caucasus

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On 12th August, Russia's Prime Minister's visit to Abkhazia - a break-away territory recognized as an independent state by Moscow - is a signal that Russia is going to consolidate its hold on the territory.

It may be recalled that Moscow recognized both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states after Georgia used force to claim sovereignty over break-away South Ossetia last year. Both the territories - Abkhazia and South Ossetia - share borders with Russia and are strategically significant for Russia. Abkhazia opens up to the Black Sea.

During the visit, Prime Minister Putin promised

violated by the US when the Bush administration supported Georgia to be a part of NATO, while Russia did not approve the intrusion of NATO at its underbelly in Georgia.

Furthermore, the US and the Western allies find themselves at a loss as to how to deal with resurgent Russia. To please Russia, the West accommodated Russia as a member of G-8 club.

At the same time, the US wants to install missile defence shield surveillance equipment in the Czech Republic and Poland (former members of Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact). On 15th August 2008 the US signed a missile defence agreement with Poland. It seems that the US and its allies are blowing cold and hot air at the same time with Russia.

menced military operations to integrate South Ossetia with Georgia on the very day when all world leaders focused their eyes on the opening of Olympics in Beijing (8th August 2008). He hopelessly miscalculated the situation in South Ossetia.

The use of force last year by Georgia has led Russia to recognize both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries, and everyone knows that underneath, Kosovo's recognition as an independent country from Serbia is not far from Russia's mind in according recognition to the territories.

It seems that nothing concrete is on the table between Russia and the US to restore peace in the region. During the recent trip to the region, US Vice-President Joe Biden reportedly stated that there was no military solution to Georgia's conflict with its break-away territories - Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Georgia's use of force has dramatically changed the scenario. It was reported in the media that Washington had advised the Georgian pro-American President not to take military operations in South Ossetia because Russians would be immediately involved. He reportedly did not listen to their advice and believed that the US would assist him to repel the retaliatory attack of Russia.

The stark reality was that friendly states of Georgia did not want to spend 'blood and treasure' when the risks were too high and vital national interests were not involved. In this instance no NATO member state including the US wanted to pick a fight with Russia on its door step on behalf of Georgia.

Currently there is a security vacuum in the region. Neither the UN nor OSCE (Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe) has any plans to address the security issues. The EU monitoring mission which was deployed to implement the ceasefire agreement operates on the Georgian side of the border.

Russian defence commentator Colonel Viktor Litovkin sums up the perception of Russia about the West in the following words: "NATO has deviated from its original charter and assumed responsibility on a global scale for everything that happens. The West looks as if it is imposing its ideology on others, just as the former Soviet Union did. Fortunately we have recovered from this disease, the Bush Administration has now caught it."

The reality is that both Abkhazia and South Ossetia would not accept Georgia's sovereignty over them. Russia is also unlikely to withdraw its recognition or presence of both the territories. The real question is whether the West has any leverage on Russia to agree to any form of co-existence with Georgia that does not equate to their full independence. At present such expectations are grim.



to spend around US\$465 million (twice the size of Abkhazia's GDP) to build Russian military bases on its soil to fortify its border with Georgia. Russia's Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, who accompanied the Prime Minister, said that Moscow would station 3,600 troops in Abkhazia, where 1,000 Russian border guards are already deployed.

The Abkhazians have welcomed the Russian move to prevent future conflict with Georgia. The steps seemed to have sealed any option for negotiated peace settlement in the region.

During the time of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, there was a gentleman's agreement by the US that NATO would not be expanded to the disadvantage of Russia. It meant that NATO would not expand to the borders of Russia.

At the heart of the problem lies the fact that this very agreement with former Soviet Union was

However, the Obama administration is reviewing its policy of missile defence shield in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Georgia's former President Shevardnadze's decision in 1992 to allow Russia into South Ossetia as part of the peacekeeping force has complicated the issues regarding South Ossetia. Furthermore, Georgia's use of force and refusal to contemplate and reconciliation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (breakaway areas of Georgia) was a political blunder.

Therefore, a game of balance of power between the US and Russia is taking place to influence political contours in Georgia and the pro-US Georgia's President Saakashvili has been sucked in.

Mikhail Saakashvili was naive enough to believe that he could take on Russia on the issue of South Ossetia. His American-trained officers com-

Should Pakistan sign the CTBT?

RABIA AKHTAR

After South Asian nuclearization in 1998, the P-5 and the international community strongly condemned nuclear testing by both India and Pakistan and urged both states to immediately sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In an initial reaction to the pressures thus generated on Pakistan, the then Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed was quoted as claiming that Pakistan "would not be coerced into signing CTBT in disregard to its vital security interests." However, in an attempt to deal with the political backlash of nuclear testing in the form of sanctions by the international community, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while addressing the 53rd session of the United Nations General Assembly stated that, "Pakistan has consistently supported the conclusion of a CTBT for over 30 years...In a nuclearized South Asia, CTBT would have relevance if Pakistan and India are both parties to the Treaty. However, Pakistan's adherence to the Treaty will take place only in conditions free from coercion or pressure."

However, the CTBT drafted for signature in 1996 was rejected by US Senate in 1999. In a speech the then US Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, summed up the concerns of many states adequately when she said, "If we do not accept the rules we insist that others follow, others will not follow them either. The result will be a steady weakening of nuclear controls." The US Senate's rejection of the CTBT brought much shame to the US which until then was the biggest proponent of arms control and disarmament.

The rejection created divergent views on the credibility of the treaty itself, thus making it relatively easier for states like Pakistan to take a firm position. Following the US Senate's failure to ratify CTBT, an interesting editorial appeared in Asia Times which reinforced views on the path to be followed, urging both India and Pakistan not to sign the CTBT and continue with the development of credible nuclear deterrents and nuclear command and control structures reiterating that "this will add rather than detract from stability and security on the subcontinent. And there would be nothing whatsoever wrong with both countries testing their arsenals and delivery systems in the future in the framework of timely notification."

Pakistan's position on the CTBT remains very clear that Pakistan will not be the first to resume testing in the region since it was not the one to start it in the first place. This notwithstanding, the dynamics in South Asia at play today are different from those a decade earlier when both India and Pakistan were new nuclear states. With the signing of the Indo-US nuclear deal, the determinants and prospects of Pakistan's signing the CTBT

have become more difficult on four broad levels. First, India has made it absolutely clear that it wants to retain the option of nuclear testing. This alone leaves no room for further speculation that Pakistan's signing of CTBT would be detrimental to its national interest. Post Indo-US nuclear deal, the Indian stance on CTBT was reiterated quite categorically when it was stated that, "New Delhi would not sign the CTBT even it was ratified by other countries."

Second, the recent launch of Indian nuclear submarine Arihant serves as a significant indicator of how Pakistan should respond to regional and international arms control and disarmament arrangements. The Arihant will be armed with ballistic missiles thus having the potential to provide India with the second strike credibility that it requires for the credibility of its nuclear deterrent. Although India has time and again stated that its second strike capability will not be Pak-centric, Pakistan cannot be content with mere rhetoric, it needs to look beyond semantics.

Third, the Indian Cold Start doctrine has a negative impact on strategic stability in South Asia because it aims to sabotage the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence under the cover of a conventional doctrine.

Fourth, coupled with an offensive conventional military doctrine, Indian ambitions for the acquisition of a missile defense shield push Pakistan towards a recurring security dilemma. Thus it is useful and meaningful for Pakistan to maintain a pragmatic Indo-centric position on CTBT instead of just trying to be the good guy.

Pakistan should be ready for any eventuality in the region given its strategic dynamics with India and also because of the presence of extra regional forces which make South Asia highly vulnerable and any arms control agreement inoperable. Therefore Pakistan should retain the option of testing of its nuclear arsenal to maintain and enhance the credibility of its deterrence.

Given the current scenario, Pakistan should also realize that ten years later it will be completing the second decade of nuclearization, the world might still be idealizing complete nuclear disarmament and might still be negotiating arms control arrangements like the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). Therefore it is time to discard the symbolic significance of signing the CTBT for the comfort of the international community and analyze the practicality of it. For Pakistan, it would be suicidal to sign the CTBT, the compulsions of its immediate strategic environment suggest as much.

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