

Racing Against Time?

Election in Indian parliamentary culture is a serious matter. It is not something to be played at lightly. As this is the election season all political parties, 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream' alike, are back in business with their saleable commodities, promising miracles and wonders. Nowhere on earth can any parliamentarian have so much to enjoy so excessively for delivering so little. Congress Party and its main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are duelling over 'hard terror' and 'soft terror'. While addressing the security chiefs of different states the other day prime minister Manmohan Singh suggested setting up of a task force to initiate a 100-day plan to face "emerging challenges" coming from terrorism, naxalism and insurgency. There was nothing new in the idea. It was all about sending message to security bureaucrats that they would have more budgetary provisions in the days to come. But BJP was not satisfied. They dismissed the Singh medicine as too mild to combat 'terrorism'. What all they want is more stringent laws to keep hundreds of thousands of innocent people behind bars without trial. Maybe they need immediate construction of more jails on war footing because prison population in this hapless country is increasing at an alarming rate. And existing draconian acts are more than enough to detain anybody on mere suspicion of anti-national activities. In fact even ordinary policemen can kill anyone with impunity, simply by dubbing him 'terrorist'.

Ironically BJP is now caught on the wrong foot after the exposure of Malegaon blast episode as some saffron outfits owing allegiance to hard hindutva ideology are found to be equally notorious in terror campaign. In a way BJP is now swallowing the bitter pill of its own prescription. But they have something to overshadow Malegaon scenario. With Mumbai getting terror shock again—at the time of writing panic gripped the financial capital of India—BJP may have an occasion to campaign for hard measures against the minority community.

True, Congress is raising the bogey of 'hindu terrorism' to buy minority vote. They are talking tough against some saffron establishments because elections are around. In the end both parties are trying to divert public attention from the agonising economic crisis affecting every sector of the society. Almost bad news is coming from every corner of the globe daily, in respect of meltdown and its pitfalls. But the persons in Government, including prime minister, assure the people, somewhat routinely that everything is fine. It won't touch India. But the International Monetary Fund has a different view. They say, not with less authority that the recent recession will continue to have an impact on all economies, big or small, including India even after a year. 'A severe global recession, combined with a deeper than expected credit squeeze, would have significant spillovers to the region through both exports and a range of financial channels'. Already big business houses in India are resorting to shutdowns, wage cuts and retrenchments in the hope that this will restore order to economic life. There are lots of reasons it will fail. There is no magic wand to pull the economy, otherwise closely integrated with the global market, back from the brink. So they are talking more eloquently about terrorism, naxalism and insurgency.

The left, the parliamentary left to be precise, is also gearing up to show something because electoral politics demands it. So the left and its secular allies, mostly regional and casteist outfits, protested against the Centre demanding cut in fuel prices, knowing full well the Union government was considering to reduce fuel prices after assembly polls, in view of drastic fall in crude prices in international market.

Not surprisingly the BJP was the only party that opposed the move to cut petrol and diesel prices because they saw in it a deliberate ploy to influence voters. Then in BJP's vision of Bharat, nearly 50 percent of the population does not exist because they live below the poverty line, having no purchasing power. In India today principled struggle is both desperately needed and as yet still too rare. The far left that doesn't discard legal and parliamentary avenues, continues to react to spontaneity without a long-term road map to mobilise the masses in their millions. The on-going tribal unrest across the country has the potential to develop into a broad-based mass movement for a radical change, but the far left is not in a position to unite so many tribal upsurges with different local dimensions under a common banner. This mighty system is their enemy and yet they remain divided and rudderless while confronting it. □□□ 3-12-2008