

‘Welcome to Democracy Now’

Drama is over. What is not over is mockery of this high-sounding parliamentary democracy. That the confidence motion would go in favour of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government was a foregone conclusion. In truth the much publicised trust vote of July 22 was a well-designed poster for young parliamentary hopefuls who are looking for somekind of direction in their lives. Horse-trading (or what was once described by Chaudhury Charan Singh as donkey trading) has been a tested practice of parliamentary democracy, notwithstanding stringent laws against floor-crossing. Congress knows the art well how to transform minority into majority. The late Narasimha Rao did it. And now the Singhs virtually recreated the same scenario.

The issue that apparently triggered the crisis forcing the Left to withdraw support to the Congress-led UPA government is Indo-US nuclear deal. Why the Left took so much time to call it a day allowing the Congress to make the deal almost operational is open to question. As the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was not opposed to the deal efforts put by their National Democratic Alliance members to unseat the UPA government were half-hearted. Nor were they enthusiastic enough to have a heterogeneous coalition government, possibly under the redoubtable Mayawati of Uttar Pradesh, in place of Manmohan Singh government.

The CPM-led Left Front is now talking about launching mass movement against India's abject surrender to America. But they have already missed the bus. They are no less responsible for the deal getting materialised because of their reluctance to seriously oppose American hegemonism in other areas of concern. In a way they too are part of the process; they too champion nuclear power as a safe and potential alternative source of energy.

Not for nothing US ambassador David C Mulford hailed the Congress victory in Parliament and expressed hope that the American Congress would clear the 123 agreement in early September to make the Indo-US nuclear deal operational.

The missing link, however, in the Delhi-Washington axis is that the deal would be clinched in any case even in the absence of Manmohan Singh and George W Bush in high offices. What is at stake is nuclear energy business, not nuclear weapons as such. Not surprisingly, there is one issue that President Bush and presidential aspirants Barack Obama and John McCain all agree on : expanding the use of nuclear power. While addressing nuclear power at a news conference the other day Bush hailed nuclear energy as a way to reduce American dependence on oil and protect the environment. In India, Gandhians, Saffronites, Communists—all subscribe to Bush's idea of world energy vision. And democrat Barack Obama simply echoed Bush when he recently opined in favour of nuclear power as part of the energy mix. ‘There are no silver bullets to this issue’. Thus observed Obama while advocating for nuclear power. And republican John McCain went a step further to pose himself as an argumentative American to advise the concerned people to imitate the French as ‘80 percent of their electricity in France is generated by nuclear power’. In truth McCain's argument was more affirmative than Bush's : ‘nuclear power must be part of any equation

that leads to addressing climate change and also leads to addressing dependence on foreign oil'. So the Sonia Gandhis and Singhs have nothing to lose even if the signing of the agreement is delayed by a month or two. The deal is very much in the pipeline, no matter who rules the White House, at the expense of Iranian Gas Pipeline, of course. It won't take much time to prove what Mr Singh has done as a prime minister would go against the best interests of the country and people.

No doubt the much publicised victory of the UPA government in the trust (or mistrust) vote in parliament on July 22, was nothing but "subversion" of parliamentary democracy. Manipulation, bribery and intimidation finally led to cross-voting and saved the day for the Congress.

For one thing this parliamentary hypocrisy is a general scenario for most third world democracies. What happened in Zimbabwe, not very long ago is case in point. The ruling party of President Robert Mugabe killed, burned, maimed, ousted and deported opposition leaders and activists in a rigged parliamentary election by throwing overboard all democratic norms—all these to help one man to get elected to stay supreme as state power. And they call it popular mandate! India being the citadel of third world parliamentary culture, cannot be any exception. In India, convicted persons and the accused with serious criminal charges get elected in parliament in election after election, to represent 'people'. It's history now. The Congress-engineered tricky trust vote of July 22, is one more footnote in that history. □□□ 23-07-2008