

KRITIK UND KOMMENTARE

The Strangest of Situations*

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The strangest of situations prevails in the Capital. Internally, we are being disrupted by an unending flow of refugees from East Bengal; the seven million who have crossed the border are likely to be joined by millions of others now moving in the direction of India. Externally, the whole basis of our foreign relations has been totally disrupted; our friends the Arabs do not allow us to publish even an advertisement in their newspapers which projects the Indian view on Bangla Desh, and the wooing of Peking by Washington completes the picture of a nation isolated and in the doldrums.

The strangeness is brought on by the private admission that all these developments were sudden and unexpected — in fact, they caught us throughly unprepared — and the public posture that “we are not alone”, that everything is under control. Over the years, we have grown accustomed to this kind of double-talk and double-think, but the situation today is qualitatively of a different dimension. It is perhaps the most critical moment in the recent history of this nation.

The future hangs on decisions being taken every day without preparation, without detailed consultation, off the cuff. The unreality is reinforced by the vicious vendettas which are launched by the political leaders against those who appear to cross their path.

Dangers of Adventurism

It is at moments like these that one is extra-sensitive to the possibility of adventurist decision-making which could push us into situations from which it would take decades to extricate ourselves. I refer to the glib talk that is now current about the need to do something ‘dramatic’ with the Soviet Union to counter the Sino-American detente. We talk as if a Washington-Peking alliance has been forged. If one super power has betrayed us, we must jump into the embrace of the other. We equate ourselves with China, forgetting that we are still nowhere near the self-reliant power of our northern neighbour.

Our inability to analyse the developing world situation and the consequences for us of events in Bangla Desh is sharply highlighted by the pleas, particularly in leftist circles, that an Indo-Soviet alliance should be the response to our isolation. That such an alliance would be motivated by the interests of the senior partner is not understood. We are persuaded that we would call the tune.

* Aus: Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. VI, Nos. 30–32, Bombay: July 1971. 1499–1501.

Obviously, in an unconscious kind of way, we seem to imagine that the balance of power in the world is being manipulated with the intention of doing India down. This prevailing obsession blinds us to the stirrings in so many important countries in East Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia and Europe which can become allies in the foreseeable future. An active policy of meaningful alignments with these countries should be the precursor of any move to "dramatise" our relations with the Soviet Union. If only Foreign Minister Swaran Singh could see this reality, then his statement about "not being alone" would make sense. And we would not be playing a stooge.

But the reality is different. For too long we have designed a foreign policy based on a recognition of only two 'presences' — the USA and the USSR. All else is flotsam and jetsam. And when a crisis hits us, we attack everyone. Witness the sorry debates on foreign policy in the current session of Parliament. Now, lobbyists will seek to move us either in the direction of the USSR or towards the alleged Sino-US axis. Indeed, someone has already uttered the thought that in the years ahead, Pakistan will be reserved for the US 'presence', India for the Soviet and Bangla Desh for the Chinese! Yes, **status quo**-ist thinking in the context of the changing balance of power is not far of the mark.

Activist Role in Bangla Desh

It is in this context that our actions on Bangla Desh become supremely important. To accept a lazy development of the liberationist situation in the East is to open the way to super power and great power 'presences' on the subcontinent. An activist role to break the back of the Pakistani militarists in the shortest possible time would open the way not only to the liberation of Bangla Desh, but the liberation of the subcontinent from many thraldoms, hidden and not-so-hidden. With these transforming possibilities inherent in the situation, one cannot but marvel at the political fiddlers in the Capital and their fiddling within Parliament and outside.

It should be apparent even to a novice in international diplomacy that the super powers, who have a major stake in **status quo**-ism, will move the United Nations to prevent any action leading to a qualitative change on the Indian subcontinent. To imagine otherwise would be crassly naive. The positioning of impotent UN observers along the border is calculated to assist the Pakistani militarists in their genocidal policies.

The only effective counter to these mischievous moves is to make the UN 'dialogue' with the Bangla Desh government. We cannot even suggest this so long as we remain 'restrained' and refuse to recognise Bangla Desh. Maybe, Indira Gandhi is beginning to see the need to play from a position of strength. A cornering operation always sharpens her responses.

Whatever the various commitments of our parochial, parasitic, semi-educated politicians, it is now almost generally accepted that we have no decision-making machinery in the sensitive areas of international diplomacy. The bare rudiments of such an apparatus exist for internal policies, but there is a vacuum once we move to face the gambits of other nations. Our performance, and that of the Chinese, highlight the failings.

We are too much at the mercy of lobbyists. That is why a cornered Indira Gandhi is at her best. But the danger remains that when the decisive decisions begin to be taken, the preparation will be scanty. Presumably, at this juncture, the various options available to us are fairly well defined.

Anarchy Cannot be Blessed

Naturally, a great deal of the GOI's attention is taken up by the political violence and disruption which stalks East India. Significantly, those who are the loudest in their support for Bangla Desh are the most active in disrupting East India. If the present parleys sponsored in Calcutta among warring political factions yield no dividend, the GOI will have to take some rather critical actions. Anarchy cannot be blessed by the Centre, and any such impression will have to be dissolved speedily.

All our problems are actually the result of neglect and delay. Even now, a violent posture alone ensures attention. The government of Indira Gandhi has to understand this simple fact, or else no amount of parleying is going to halt the tide of disruption. The backlog of problems, supplemented by the arrival of millions of refugees from East Bengal, creates an explosive situation calling for drastic measures.

There can be no more tinkering and shelving and procrastinating. Those who indulge in these familiar antics must be sacked. Unfortunately so far, only the dynamic doers have suffered — the men who live by tackling challenging tasks despite the damnable rules and regulations which have condemned our people to misery and stagnation.

To say that Indira Gandhi has to shake up the system beyond recognition is like playing a tune that is tedious. Yet, that is all that one can say. Without such a shake-up, we can only record our drift towards certain disaster. The strangest of situations. We know what is wrong, but we drag our feet.

I am putting my faith in the criticality that is building. A moment is in the making when we will not be able to do anything else, but move — internationally and internally — to assert our sovereign interests. I only hope it is not too late, for delay builds up the cost so terribly.

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