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Anatomy of Congress Defeat in Tripura

Vikas Kumar



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Death-defying Resistance to New World Order

This is the thirteenth day since the launching of the US-led invasion of Iraq. The governments of the world, including those of the UN Security Council's permanent members opposed to the renewed hostilities in the Gulf, are helpless bystanders as the United States continues its savage, barbaric and illegal war on the Gulf state indiscriminately killing innocent civilians—as many as 653 Iraqis have been killed as these lines are being written—even as global opinion against the war mounts with every passing day with the anti-war protest rallies across the globe, in particular the Western countries (Germany, France, Britain and the US as well as Australia), assuming a dimension not witnessed even during the Vietnam War (that had literally traumatised the psyche of the American public). While the manifestation of international sentiments against the war is doubtless

heartening in this otherwise depressing scenario marked as it is by the unprecedented show of arrogance of power on the part of the global supercop-turned-into-supermonster, what is most inspiring to all peace-loving peoples cherishing freedom and independence is the heroic resistance being put up by the Iraqi people led by their leader Saddam Hussein, their elected popular head of state. One is well aware of the Western propaganda denouncing him with all possible epithets in a desperate bid to seek justification for the totally unjustified, illegitimate and wanton US assault on Iraq's sovereignty that actually amounts to a direct attack on humanity as a whole. And yet, despite all such propaganda to which many well-meaning individuals have fallen victim (not to speak of the opportunist turncoats who are beholden to the US Administration on more than one count), the irrefutable fact in the light of the unfolding situation is that Iraq today is fighting for the entire mankind's survival and protection of such cherished values as 'liberty, equality and fraternity' that not only emblazoned the banner of the French Revolution but also constituted the mainspring of Abraham Lincoln's quest for a New America (as distinct from the Ugly America the Texan cowboy in the White House is hellbent on installing).

As far as we ordinary Indians are concerned, we are well aware that if the US doctrine of pre-emptive war—totally divorced from the question of self-protection in the wake of threats to its security (since Bush, Blair and Company have failed to establish any correlation whatsoever between the 9/11 terrorist strikes on the US and the Iraqi leadership, and even the figleaf of WMDs in Baghdad's possession has turned out to be a cruel joke)—prevails in the deserts and towns of Iraq where a superhuman battle is currently being waged by the Iraqi populace, it is just a question of time before any country zealously guarding its independence and sovereignty meets the fate that has presently befallen Iraq. This of course is not the understanding of the government occupying the South Block at the moment though one does notice a more forthright stand being articulated of late

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Anatomy of Congress Defeat in Tripura

VIKAS KUMAR

On March 7, 2003 the third successive Left Front Government was sworn in Tripura. The Assembly elections in the State were held along with the elections to the Assemblies of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh. The elections in the North-East received scant attention in the national print media which was busy with the far more important Assembly election in Himachal Pradesh and of course the 'extra-innings' of the ongoing World Cup Cricket. Whenever it spared time for the North-East it was to inform us about the 'alarm' caused by the spurt in militancy on the eve of the elections; on other occasions it carried terse statements of certain Delhi-based politicians on the North-East. And then finally we were served with a melange of numbers—cases of violence, voter turnout and partywise break-up of the new Assemblies. That's all for the region till the next elections or a major terrorist attack, whichever comes first.

Coming back to Tripura. We were told that 'strong indications' of an anti-incumbency were discernible. It was argued by some that the 'tactically sound move' of the Congress to ally with the Bijoy Hrangkhawl-led Indigenous National Front of Tripura (INPT) would pay heavy dividend in the tribal regions in the hills of the State, home to around 30 per cent population of Tripura. Others predicted a low voter turnout in the elections being held under the shadow of terrorism.

However, they were proved wrong on February 26, 2003 when in spite of widespread intimidation of voters carried out by the Nationalist Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a terrorist group fighting for the 'sovereign holy land of tribal Tripura', over 70 per cent people exercised their right to vote. They were again proved wrong on March 1, 2003 when defying the 'strong' anti-incumbency factor the Left Front returned to power. However, the more significant part of the victory was that INPT failed to oust the Left from the tribal areas. According to the set sharing arrangement, the INPT contested 18 out of 20 seats reserved for the tribals and the Congress contested the remaining two. The Congress managed to win one seat and INPT, which was supposed to win at least 15 seats for the Congress, had to contend with six seats. Certain North-East watchers explained the results as 'expected'. Others drew our attention to the fact that the Left succeeded in projecting the Congress-INPT

alliance negatively among the non-tribals.



It is pertinent to dissect the results of the Assembly elections to gain a better insight. To analyse the results only in terms of anti-incumbency and fear-psychosis is an affront to the dignity and intellect of the common man. Inherent in this way of thinking and attitude is the tendency to divide the society into the enlightened 'us' (the intellectuals) and the ignorant 'they' (the masses). It's not that the above two factors are not important but certainly they are not the only ones that influence a voter. Other factors like the performance of the party in government are equally, if not more, important.

The Congress forged an alliance with the INPT, an overground front of the NLFT, despite widespread criticism. Unlike the Left, Congress lacks a base among the tribals; therefore it made a calculated move to ally with the INPT. In the light of the fact that the tribal parties could win only five out of the 15 seats left for them by the Congress in the 1998 elections one is perplexed by the decision of the Congress to ally with those parties yet again. One does not need to go far back in time to figure out the reason. In the May 2000 elections for the 28-seat Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous Development Council (TTAADC), an administrative body created in 1982 under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to safeguard the interests of the tribals, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) succeeded in defeating the Left Front. In the light of the fact that the INPT, the new avatar of the IPFT, would demand more seats this time the Congress was advised to avoid committing political suicide. However, in its desperation to grab power the Congress took recourse to the short cut and left 18 seats to the INPT. This is not the first time that the Congress has entered into shady deals with suspect organisations in the State. During Indira's time they had an alliance with the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) and during Rajiv's time they joined hands with the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV). Both the TNV and TUJS are members of the INPT. Regular North-East watchers informed us that the Left suffered a 'massive erosion' of support among the tribals. The media projected a larger-than-life image of Bijoy Hrangkhawl, the INPT leader. It was claimed that he had 'rattled' the Left with his success in mobilising the tribals. They pointed out that after the demise of veteran leader

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Dasarath Deb the Left had no one to effectively mobilise the tribals. Systematic targeting of activists and supporters of the Left Front, including apolitical organisations and NGOs related to the Left, was overlooked.

But the high-voltage campaign of the Congress featuring party President Sonia Gandhi and Chief Ministers from the Congress-ruled States failed to mobilise the voters in favour of the Congress-INPT combine. It seems that in its wild rush to power the Congress forgot few basic ground realities. The IPFT won the 2000 elections to the TTAADC because of lack of security forces in the State to counter the NLFT's rigging in favour of the IPFT. The victory therefore was not an affirmation of the popular appeal of the IPFT's divisive agenda. Further, the IPFT's performance in the last three years in the TTAADC did not inspire confidence in the masses. However, a deeper underlying reality scripted the defeat of the Congress. One has to concede that the Left, unlike the Congress, is not personality-centric and its cadres are far more committed and disciplined. The death of Dasarath Deb, though a great loss was not enough to destabilise the party's base among the tribals. It needs to be noted that the Left was the first to

systematically mobilise the tribals in the State starting from the 1950s. The support base of the party among the tribals was painstakingly built over a period of decades and such bases do not evaporate overnight.

Further, notwithstanding the routine testimonies of the Congress about the democratic credentials of the INPT, the people refused to repose trust in the combine. The NLFT's violent campaign of intimidation that left scores dead failed to dampen the spirits of the people who voted *en masse* to defeat its protegee, the INPT. The people did not need sermons from the AICC headquarters to imagine the future of the State under the Congress-INPT combine. They could see with their naked eyes the 'unseen threads' that control the INPT. As if this was not enough, there was a latent fear that the Congress may leave the Chief Ministership to Bijoy Hrangkhawl in the 'larger interests' of the nation. The Left has paid a very heavy price, in terms of lives, in its democratic fight against the sectarian agenda of the unscrupulous Congress-INPT alliance. However, these sacrifices have not gone waste. The victory of the Left Front in Tripura has upheld the cause of democracy, which presently is under attack from sectarian forces all over the country. ■

CHINA From Marxism to Modernisation

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The defeat of the imperial China in the Opium War had hurt the feelings of Sino-centrism. The idea of limited modernisation suggested by the thinkers of the late 19th century, such as Liang Chichao and Kang Yuwei, failed to solve the riddles of the semi-feudal and semi-colonial China and was replaced by the idea of Marxism in the early 20th century. Ideologically, Marxism mobilized the millions of Chinese and the CPC led a successful Communist Revolution. However, the post-Revolution, CPC faced a serious puzzle as its two mentors Mao and Liu, developed a different vision of socialist China. While Mao formulated an indigenous socialist model of development, his counterpart Liu suggested the theory of "Comprehensive Modernisation".

In post-Mao China, Deng, a staunch follower of Liu, implemented the pragmatic package of Four Modernisations on the one hand and proclaimed the idealist charter of Four Cardinal Principles on the other. "The Two" proved to be incompatible and China fell into the trap of "right opportunism". Alas. The author, in this book painfully argues that the most authentic Communist Revolution eventually failed to build a "genuine socialist society". All the gigantic endeavours of Mao thus went in vain. Sadly, Hua also failed. Objectively, Deng succeeded in building a "non-socialist society". However, the western powers cannot take China for granted because in the last 150 years, China has produced a series of patriotic leadership from Liang Chichao to Hu Jintao.

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