

GETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT



The right to vote implies certain responsibilities...the least being, some understanding of issues at stake. The elections are the time to do some stock taking, draw up a sort of balance sheet on the varied claims and achievements.

The country since the last franchise has gone through traumatic experience. The sudden declaration of emergency was a numbing shock... the fundamental rights were suspended and strict censorship imposed, for the first time on freedom of the press and the media... a privilege not encroached upon even by the alien British during the independence struggle.

The reason that prompted the government to take such an extreme action remains open to doubts... but assuming that it was necessary and clamped in the overall interests of the nation, let us at least examine whether it has benefited.

1) The centre continued to amass vast powers unto itself...and the only visible outcome was that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The delicate balance between the judiciary and the executive so every essential for protection of certain basic, fundamental rights was upset by arbitrary constitutional amendments, leading to erosion of the rights of the public against executive excesses.

2) Emergency made exploitation easy. People not directly connected with the government, started interfering with work of the officials, indulging in such demolition activities as removal of zopadapatis etc., an activity that earned for Delhi, the unpleasant sobriquet of Demolition government....

3) Emergency's most strident claim that it has benefitted the common man, sounds rather hollow in view of the following facts:

a) The numbers of unemployed have doubled in five years i.e. 5.5 millions to 11 millions on the live register. The increase in the percentage of the educated unemployed is even worse.

b) Nearly 4,000 large and medium scale industries are sick rendering idle sinking of capital worth about Rs. 5,000 crores.

c) The last few months have witnessed a price rise of nearly 12%...and that too brought about largely by essential commodities like oil, textile, sugar, pulses etc. thus a burden in actual terms of lower and middle class would be much higher. And according to all the present available indications, it will not be surprising if the inflation soon exceeds 20%...particularly considering the following facts;

a) The agricultural production in 76-77 is marginally lower than that of last year.

b) Steel, coal which were the mainstay of encouraging indices are now at saturation point.

c) Taking into account the population growth of 2% per annum, the decline in agricultural production and only slight growth in industrial output the per capita income cannot but slide downwards The most important and fundamental point however is that apart from the physical handicaps, more frightening is the fear complex generated by the emergency. People grew afraid overnight of their own shadows...and sycophancy became the trend and the fashion. The dream of freedom realised with independence faded into a dead memory. And what if the mental slavery became a habit?

Emergency, it is claimed, promoted discipline economy almost scotched. Among the other line, thereby encouraging greater production. Inflation has been arrested and the parallel black gains cited are comparative industrial peace, a check on smuggling activity, increased foreign exchange inflow and further development of export. But, for the common man, nothing much has really changed. The bread may be a little cheaper, thanks to a kindly monsoon, but the prices of all other essential commodities have increased two-fold. Oil, sugar, kerosene, etc. are prohibitively expensive. The bureaucratic machinery continues to be as lethargic in the matter of issuing ration cards as, generally, in all its other dealings with the public. One would protest if one dared...but the emergency has ensured the silence.

Any country which tries to build its image at the neglect of its prime responsibilities is heading for trouble. Nearly 30 years after independence and despite the continuity afforded by a single-party rule at the centre, our educational system is in a muddle, the health services extremely poor, and even such basic amenities as proper sanitation and a roof over the head remain distant dreams for many. The export performance, therefore, can mean very little in daily life.

Judiciary has been rendered impotent, the law has become elitist protecting those in high offices. Is that fair? Is it justice?

Granted there are no more crippling morchas and strikes peace has, at last, descended on to the otherwise turbulent scene...but it is calm of the graveyard where nothing moves, nothing stirs, there is only the finality of death.

We have over the years tried centralised Russian-style planning with disastrous effects. Then why not switch over to JANATA PARTY which desires to proceed on Gandhian lines, a style more suited to the genius of our people.