

India Goes to Polls

Who will Form the Government?

A compromise is not the consensus. It often leads to an incohesive, weak, government. Ministers may not also be sparkingly clean. Temptations to go from one flock to another are going to be many.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

Both Congress and the BJP are making out as if the contest is between the two. Each one claims that it will secure a majority on its own and form the government. But both of them are in for a surprise. No doubt they are the two main political parties. Still, both of them, even put together, will not cross 300 in the 543-member Lok Sabha.

Regional and small parties look like getting 120 odd seats and they will be in the driving seat. Their natural affinity — a few of them are still members of the National Front — is with the combination of Janata Dal and the communists, which may obtain around 130. A non-Congress, non-BJP government is on the cards. Some members, elected on the Congress ticket, may go to the side of such an alternative, once they sniff power.

There are three post-election scenarios. One, Congress and the BJP form a coalition. Numberwise, the two will have the strength to constitute the government. But this possibility is hard to imagine. Politics make strange bed-fellows. Yet, certain situations are beyond the realm of even probability.

"If Chandrasekhar and George Fernandes, the life-long socialists, can join hands with communal forces like BJP, why not Congress president Narasimha Rao?" This remark by a top Congress leader the other day makes me think that Indian politics has reached a stage where anything is possible. He went on to admit that there were many supporters of BJP in Congress.

If such a happening, beyond the known trends of politics, does take place, Congress will undoubtedly split. Party spokesman V M Gadgil's remark is significant. Asked what would happen if Congress were to divide on issue of joining hands with BJP, he said, he for one would not join it. That was one way of saying that some of his colleagues might.

Can the BJP make on its own? It cannot because its presence is felt largely in the Hindi heartland, including Maharashtra and Gujarat. The total number of Lok Sabha seats of these states is 305. The BJP won only 126 in last election. State elections in 1993, after demolition of Babri Masjid, dipped its support still further. The party lost UP, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh and survived by a whisker in Rajasthan. The gain in Maharashtra was through the Shiv Sena, more fundamentalistic in its posture.

The second scenario is that Congress, Janata Dal, the communists and regional parties — all of them come together to form government. It is plausible. Janata leader Ramakrishna Hegde suggested this long ago. However, he favoured Narasimha Rao to head such a coalition. This may neither be acceptable to the communists, nor to most Janata Dal members. They may be persuaded to support Congress, but not Rao. Were he to step down from Congress leadership, the attitude of such parties as shun congress would

change. Then a non-BJP grand coalition is possible.

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