

Governance will Pose Problems

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THAT the Bharatiya Janata Party and its *parivar* will get the first chance to form the government was never in doubt once their tally was 252 in the 543-member Lok Sabha. But when Congress — Mrs Sonia Gandhi, to be more explicit — made it clear that it would sit in the opposition, the swearing-in of the BJP combination was only a matter of time. The United Front, more so the Communists, tried to assemble an alternative but gave it up when they found Congress reluctant.

CPM leader Harkishen Singh Surjeet was able to win over the outgoing Congress president Sitaram Kesri by dangling the leadership of the coalition before the party. But Sonia Gandhi, the real boss, wanted the BJP to form the government in the hope that the combine would expose its limitations and contradictions before long. She had even planned the absence of some Congress MPs to stall the UF move to defeat the BJP-led coalition on the floor of the Lok Sabha.

Whatever the consideration of Sonia Gandhi, the BJP and its *parivar* deserved the President's invitation on merit. They had joined hands before the polls and people had returned them as a group, although not in a majority. In fact, the numerical superiority of the BJP was assured when it coalesced with Ramakrishna Hegde in Karnataka, Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu, Navin Patnaik (Biju Patnaik's son) in Orissa, along with the old ally, the Akalis in Punjab.

The Telugu Desam's figure of 12 was crucial because it could have tilted the balance on either side. That stage was, however, never reached. First, there was no other side on the scene once Congress decided to stand distant from the UF. Second, the Telugu Desam itself declared that it would stay neutral. BJP chief Lok Advani tried his best to have the party join the coalition. But Telugu Desam's chief Chandrababu Naidu

had a point when he argued that, as the convener of the UF, he could not indulge in what would be viewed as an act of perfidy. Also, he knew he was pitted directly against Congress in the state, which goes to the polls in the next few months. How could he have been its ally at the Centre?

The real problem of the BJP this time has not been how to come to power but how to make the governance meaningful. Without performance, it has realised, it will lose its credibility earlier than the other parties did. Too many expectations have come to be pinned on the BJP. Partly, it is its own doing because its poll plank was that

economy. With the growth rate falling to 4.5 per cent and with the food shortfall of four million tonnes, the government has a big task on its hands. The rupee's position is precarious. There is no money with the states, nor with the centre. The outgoing government has put a burden of some Rs 50,000 crore on the country, particularly the states, by upgrading the recommendations of the Pay Commission. High emoluments do not assure that the bureaucracy will be cleaner or more efficient. It has become too powerful and too defiant. Governments have turned out to be too weak to discipline it or make it perform. Since all the

constituency. Atal Behari Vajpayee has spoken in conciliatory tone even at inner party meetings. But that alone is not adequate because the difference between the BJP and opposition parties is that of ideology. The *Hindutva* philosophy comes in the way, apart from the distance that the Muslims and liberals have developed from it over the years.

There is yet another reason why the accommodation may not be possible. Those who are outside the government will try their best to pull it down. Whether this is in the interest of the country is another matter. No party in the past has risen above petty politics. Why would it now? I wish there could be some way whereby Parliament lasts for its full term of five years. But that requires an understanding, some give and take, some revision of rules of business. I do not yet see that mood or sentiment reflecting in the attitude of political parties.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

'You have tried others: give us a chance.' Partly, the non-performance or mis-performance of central governments in the last 25 years has made people believe that the BJP and its allies can do what others have failed to do. No doubt, it is a tall order but not surprising in the situation where political parties have failed to come up to people's expectations.

'We must perform within the first six months,' Advani reportedly said at a party meeting. He is quite right. The BJP and its *parivar* will be judged by what its government achieves in the next few months, say by the end of the year. The opposition will give it a hard time because it cannot be expected to refrain from carrying out its legitimate political activity on the plea, 'give them a chance.' But the BJP and its *parivar* cannot afford to give the impression of being niminy-piminy. It has to be seen to be functioning in a positive manner.

The main challenge is the

members of the BJP *parivar* will need to be accommodated because of government's uncertain strength, the quality of ministers is bound to suffer. There are very few people in the combine who can deliver the goods. This may bring down the government's stock. And some of the stalwarts on the *parivar* side are as unclean as some on the other side. How does the nation get out of the *hawala* and the kickbacks syndrome is the biggest problem. Ministers and officials are too prone to graft.

In the face of this inherent weakness, the Government, which has almost an equal number of members sitting in the opposition, will find it difficult to function. Every bill or, for that matter, every point will be fought by Congress and the UF with hostility, not harmony. There will be no leeway given. The electioneering was bitter. Both sides fought with no holds barred. It is difficult for members to show a spirit of accommodation when they have returned bruised from their

The biggest drawback is that all parties, including the BJP, have taken for granted that a mid-term poll will be held within a year or so. This may foreclose the option of even limited cooperation. Opposition parties or the BJP *parivar* may feel that any quarter shown to the other side may affect them at the polls. The *parivar* may want to avoid elections as far as possible but others will try to have them sooner in the hope of coming to power.

It looks as if the UF will begin to exert pressure on the BJP combine from Day One. However, the policy of Congress, which wants to emerge as an alternative, seems to keep the government on its toes and give it as much a hard time as possible. Its strategy is not to bring a vote of no-confidence within the next few months. But it will put the heat after some time so that the voters get the feeling that the BJP was given a chance but was found wanting. Yet what faced does Congress have to stage a comeback? A corrupt party, which has no shame in playing on the voters' sentiment in the name of dynasty, is no alternative. The misrule of 40 years will return with a vengeance.

Incidentally, the outgoing Prime Minister Inder Gujral rang up Sitaram Kesri the other day to tell him the harm that Congress had done to itself by pulling down his government. Gujral is believed to have said that Congress had gained only one seat in the Lok Sabha at the expense of four states, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

Whatever else such an observation may reflect, it conveys that the UF has not forgiven Congress for withdrawing its support. This does not hold good for the future understanding much less an alliance between the two. Some splits in the ranks of the UF, if not Congress, are on the cards. This will be to the advantage of the BJP but it will exacerbate its relationship with the opposition. But some from the latter can also cross over to the other side. I am afraid that the BJP may then bring non-issues like Mathura and Kashi to the fore. The future looks so uncertain and so messy.

India's Defining Moment with BJP at the Helm

by Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz

Even if in government the BJP will still hold its patience and will not start an orgy of temple construction over erstwhile mosques; neither the saffron brigade men will try to change the country's constitution. The party is both clever and subtle enough to wait for the appropriate hour.

AS a highly fluid situation arising out of a hung parliament after India's 12th Lok Sabha election is about to get the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is all set for re-entering the citadel of power at Delhi. Less than two years before the party was unceremoniously pushed out of it within 13 days of its occupancy when the party failed to win a confidence vote in the parliament. According to most speculations this time it would last longer — no matter how long — not because of its own strength which is marginal at the best, but because its opponents are in much more disarray today than before. While many imponderables of the coalition politics would determine the durability of a BJP-led government at the centre, the political mileage the BJP has already scored is of far greater significance in Indian politics. The party's triumphant march so long uninterrupted has already formed new contours in the country's political landscape and many of the settled equations both at the national and regional level will not be same again.

So the BJP's accession to power — this time far more firmly — cannot be regarded as just another change of guard forced by the electoral process in a democratic polity. It is much more than that. It is the change in the outlook, mindset, political philosophy and vision of each other both at inter and intra-state level. Ostensibly, it is a direct assault on the rampart of India's basic values: its republican character, cultural pluralism, rule of law and secular egalitarianism. It is about to throw a modern India back to medieval ethos of *Hindutva* and push the country into a fascist mould. BJP's conception of cultural nationalism is an enthusiasm for *Hindutva* poses a fundamental challenge to the enshrined goals in the country's constitution. By proclaiming a nuclear India, scarping article 370 of Indian constitution, introducing a uniform civil code and going ahead with Ram temple construction, all of which are on the party's agenda, BJP is likely to initiate a period of communal conflict and interstate tension afresh in the subcontinent. So when the BJP is at the helm of the country's affair it is by all reckoning a defining moment in Indian politics.

BJP's rise has however been meteoric and stunning. Born in early 80s from the remnants of Janata Party which briefly ruled India in late 70s the BJP came a cropper in 1984 election by winning just two seats in Lok Sabha. By adopting an aggressive *Hindutva* stance and throwing its lot with the Ram Temple movement of VHP, Lal Krishna Advani put the party on the fast track of Indian politics and notched up impressive tallies in 1989 election by capturing 85 Lok Sabha seats. And it never looked back ever since. In post *Rathaytra* election of 1991 the party bagged 119 seats thus becoming the largest opposition group in the parliament and polled astonishing 20.1 per cent votes. Belying the hopes of secular optimists that BJP with the scar of Babri mosque demolition would be down to dump, the party emerged as the single largest



Vajpayee with Jayalalitha: Crisis subsided for the time being

Photo courtesy — INDIA Today

majority with over 160 seats in the Lok Sabha in 1996 election although its share of popular votes remained almost unchanged. In 1998 its tally went further up without however much improvement in its country-wide support base. Just in about a decade's time it is not only at the apex of Indian politics today, it also enjoys a national spread which was formerly the monopoly of Congress. How has that come about?

Several factors worked behind the BJP's magic. First and foremost is, of course, the gradual atrophy of the Congress, the only pan-Indian party since independence. With the shrinking of ideological distance between the BJP and Congress both harbouring communalism either overtly or covertly the former could successfully occupy the political space vacated by Congress. The BJP, better organized and led clearly looked to be a robust alternative to Congress which is since riddled with corruption, infighting and leadership crisis.

Second, the BJP has been remarkably successful in masking its real intention with a humane face and by padding up its agenda with convincing phraseology. The party's strident *Hindutva* ideology was sufficiently softened not to scare the minorities, OBCs and castes. The BJP did not want to show its real face before it consolidated its newly gained strength. And of course, together with *Hindutva* the BJP meticulously shed its image of being a 'Brahmin-Bania' party. In many key states it promoted backward caste leaders, the most obvious example being Kalyan Singh in Uttar Pradesh. In almost all other states it projected backward caste at various level so that Janata Dal and its offshoots could not possibly gain with their 'Mandal' card. Thus BJP's geographical spread went hand in hand with expansion of its social base. The strategy has afforded the BJP, for the first time, a breakthrough in the south. It would now be a travesty to call it either a north Indian or a Brahmin Party.

Third, the party's strategy of forging alliances in state after state has also paid off. What it attempted in it was to put to

gether a winning combination so that BJP could emerge as a clear winner to seize power and initiate a process to decimate its opponents in those states. BJP's alliance with Haryana Vikash Party in Haryana and Samata Party in Bihar helped the party to wipe out Congress from these states. The Party's brinkmanship in forging alliance with a secular and regional outfit like AIADMK baffled Ms Jayalalitha's traditional allies. BJP's partnership with Biju Patnaik's Janata Dal in Orissa, RK Hegde's Lok Shakti in Karnataka and Mamta Banerjee's Trinamul Congress in West Bengal gave the party atleast a toehold in those states where BJP had no existence earlier. As a result of similar strategies the BJP brought Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, the country's most populous and largest states respectively, in its fold.

Fourth, the articulate leadership of Advani, the shrewdest politician of India at this moment, has also been a catalyst for the party's spectacular achievement in the poll. Rarely carried away by emotions he displayed, amidst the doldrums of India's complex pre-poll politics, remarkable patience in steering the party on a balanced course thereby earning the voters' admiration and sympathy for his party. Not only he exuded confidence for the baffled nation he also unerringly addressed, during the campaign, only the issues which struck a chord with the aspirations of Indian masses. It was not thus surprising that he together with Vajpayee could attract politicians of wide varieties of background who made a bee-line for BJP on the eve of the elections. Interestingly, they included not just stray politicians without distinct ideological base but also veterans of long secular credentials like George Fernandes, Ms Jayalalitha, Ram Krishna Hegde and Mamta Banerjee.

The last but not the least had been the BJP's exclusive weapon of coercion, intimidation and rowdism as were displayed in capturing power in Uttar Pradesh. In the meantime the myth of the presence of a countervailing secular force in the country has been exploded with the large scale defection from

its camp. The upper caste leadership even of the secular parties, it seems, had seldom been comfortable in its secular fold. Apparently it only manipulated the minorities and the lower caste as its vote bank. They would now play the same game while in the BJP. The election '98 proved to its hilt just how hollow was its secular pretension. As revealed from the defection pattern it was the upper caste leaders who left their parent parties to perpetuate their traditional privileges now from the platform of BJP.

Notwithstanding, the BJP's humane face as well as softening up on the issues of *Hindutva* during the election campaign the harsh fact is that the various constituents of *sangh parivar* — the RSS, the VHP, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, Durga Vahini, Bajrang Dal, Siv Sena and so on — will simply not allow their 'special issues' to be diluted and compromised by the BJP government. They, particularly the RSS, has a definitive vision of India. They have waited with ominous patience for a chance to put it into practice. So the BJP government cannot be evaluated by how many times Vajpayee made mealy-mouthed liberal statements or the fact that Uma Bharti had a Muslim aid to help her during the campaign or by the party's startling declaration that the Babri Masjid was a closed chapter and the demolition of mosques at Kashi and Mathura were no more on agenda. What is on the agenda of the *parivar* to which the BJP owes its first loyalty is a profound reengineering of India that will bring into question many of the country's established social and cultural assumptions.

Nevertheless, none of these reengineering will be attempted by the BJP right now. Even if in government the BJP will still hold its patience and will not start an orgy of temple construction over erstwhile mosques; neither the saffron brigade men will try to change the country's constitution. The party is both clever and subtle enough to wait for the appropriate hour. Given the BJP's vulnerability in managing its coalition of almost two dozens of disparate alliances that hour has not as yet struck.

Garfield



Tom and Jerry



AL wants to unite all to steer ahead dev: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government wants to unite the people irrespective of race, creed and religion to steer the country towards development and prosperity, reports UNB.

'We believe in non-communal politics, the people of religious communities have the same rights and privileges to enjoy,' she said inaugurating a Development Centre of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at Kakrail in the afternoon.

Hasina said this country belongs to all — Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian. 'There is no racial, religious, class or caste discrimination in Bangladesh.'

'This country is equally dear to all of us. All the citizens enjoy equal rights, and together we share the weal and woe, happiness and sorrows, and together we reap the benefits of development and prosperity.'

The Prime Minister said father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman freed the country through uniting all the people irrespective of religion, caste or creed with the spirit of non-communalism.

Referring to the signing of peace agreement in Chittagong Hill Tracts, she said this government believes in peace, not in conflicts. Peace and stability is essential for economic development, for which the government is striving hard, she added.

Hasina said the government is cordial in developing the condition of religious groups and castes. 'Even we have given emphasis on development of small groups of the country and nurture their cultural individuality so they do not feel neglected.'

The government is trying for the overall development of the

country and taking all possible steps to this end, she said.

'We laid topmost priority on expansion of education, industrialisation, creation of self employment opportunities, and development of human resources to free the nation from hunger, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy,' she said urging all to come forward for successful implementation of these programmes.

The Prime Minister said the people have to be motivated so that they can take initiative for self employment. 'We must not forget that no noble initiative is small, and no honest effort goes unrewarded.'

12 tech training centres to be developed

The government has undertaken a programme to set up 12 technical training centres (TTCs), including a women one, at a cost of Tk 100 crore, reports UNB.

Labour and Manpower Minister M A Mannan said this while addressing the field level officials of the Manpower, Employment and Training Bureau yesterday.

The Labour Minister said the present government has given much emphasis on vocational and technical training to alleviate poverty through human resources development.

The government, he said, has already taken necessary measures to strengthen training programmes at 11 TTCs and one marine technology centre under the Bureau.

He urged all to become more active in expanding labour market in abroad by making skilled labour force.

Metropolitan



BNP procession in city yesterday seeking solution to multifarious problems faced by the city-dwellers. —Star photo

Prof Louise meets DU VC

Prof Louise Johnson, head of the Laboratory of Molecular Bio-physics, Oxford University, UK and wife of Nobel laureate late Prof Abdus Salam paid a courtesy call on Prof A K Azad Chowdhury, Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University at the latter's residence-office yesterday, reports BSS.

Prof Johnson discussed with the Vice-Chancellor regarding the link programme which she made with the Department of Physics of Dhaka University. She also discussed her assistance to set up a bio-physics laboratory and introduce bio-physics course at the Physics Department.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked Prof Johnson for her visit to and interest in the Dhaka University.

Out-going Turkish envoy thanks PM

The out-going Turkish Ambassador to Bangladesh, Kemal Ozcan Davaz, made a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday morning reports BSS.

The Turkish envoy thanked the government for extending him cooperation during his tenure in Bangladesh. He praised the leadership of Sheikh Hasina and said Bangladesh is marching on the path of progress and prosperity under her able leadership.

The prime minister expressed the hope that the existing relations between the two countries would be strengthened further.

Hasina referred to the excellent investment climate in Bangladesh and said the foreign investors, including from Turkey, would come forward and take the opportunity.

Saudi army chief calls on Mustafiz

The visiting Chief of General Staff of the Royal Saudi Armed Forces, General Saleh Bin Al Bin Mohammad Al Mohava, called on Chief of Army Staff Lt General Muhammad Mustafizur Rahman, Bir Bikram, at the army headquarters here yesterday, reports UNB.

General Saleh stayed with the Chief of Army Staff for some time and discussed matters of mutual interest.

Earlier on his arrival at the Dhaka Cantonment General Saleh was given guard of honour by a smart contingent of the army at the Senakunja. He took salute and inspected the guard. He also planted a sapling in front of the Senakunja.

The Saudi Army Chief and members of his delegation also visited Comilla and Sylhet cantonments yesterday.

Week-long eye camp opens in Rajshahi

RAJSHAHI, Mar 18: A week-long eye camp began in Puthia, Rajshahi today, reports UNB.

State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Prof Zinatun Nesa Talukder formally inaugurated the eye camp, organised by 'Pangu Shishu Niketan'.

About 200 eye patients will be operated upon while about 1,000 will be provided necessary treatment in the camp.

So far, 'Pangu Shishu Niketan' conducted eighteen eye camps and provided treatment to about 25,000 eye patients.

Inaugurating the camp, the State Minister urged the volunteer organisations to render their services for the causes of distressed and underprivileged people.

The inaugural function was also addressed by Chairman of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank Tajul Islam Md Faruk.

Sanitation week begins in Khulna

KHULNA, Mar 18: A week-long sanitation week was inaugurated in Khulna, as elsewhere in the country, today, reports BSS.

In Khulna, the week has been organised jointly by the Khulna City Corporation and public health department. A big procession of various government, semi-government and non-government organisations was brought out in the morning which paraded the city streets before ending at Khulna Zia Hall.

Speakers at the rally stressed the need for proper sanitation for maintaining a safe health and called for making the people aware of the need for sanitation.

Weather

Dry weather likely

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry across the country during the next 24 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Slight rise in day temperature is expected over the country during the period.

According to Met Office, country's highest temperature 35.2 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Teknaf and the lowest 15.0 degrees at Rangpur.

The sun sets today at 6:04 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:09 am.



Floating Women Workers Union staged a demonstration in the city yesterday in protest against alarming repression on women and children all over the country. —Star photo