

Why did the BJP Succeed?

by K N Panikkar

The BJP's rise to power is clearly not on its own social and political support. Neither its organisational strength nor the popularity of Atal Behari Vajpayee would have ensured its success. What enabled the success of the BJP is mainly the lack of political vision of social democrats.

A fractured mandate again, the National Democratic Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party has mustered enough support to form a government. No single party has got a majority, either in terms of votes or seats. While the BJP has just about maintained its earlier strength, the Congress has further declined. The Communist Party (Marxist) has barely held on to its seat share of the last election. Only the regional parties have managed to improve their position, whatever may be the reasons for the same. The Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh, Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam in Tamilnadu, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttarpradesh and Biju Janata Dal in Orissa, who jointly account for more than hundred seats, are the prominent among them. The opinion voiced by some during the election analysis that this election reflects a polarisation of political forces and India is moving towards a bipolar system is far from the truth. In fact, the two main parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress together account for about three hundred seats. The rest, almost two hundred and fifty seats are in the kitty of smaller and regional parties.

The BJP's success in this election is mainly due to its coalition strategy. After the election of 1996, it was generally held that the era of a single party government is over and the future lies with coalitions based on a reconfiguration of political forces. The only party, which appears to have taken this lesson seriously, is the BJP. Given its communal ideological commitment and its active participation in the demolition of the Babri Masjid the BJP was not able to gather enough support to remain in power in 1996. As L K Advani recently confessed, the BJP then that it cannot come to power without incorporating

the regional parties into its support base. It therefore cobbled up an alliance of eighteen parties in 1998 and twenty-four in 1999 — although they had nothing in common ideologically and programmatically — by putting on the backburner its controversial Hindutva agenda. This strategy has yielded rich dividends in this election, as the NDA has managed to gain a comfortable majority, thanks to the performance of the allies. More than one-third of the seats of the NDA is their contribution, most of them in single digit. Rather than the charisma of Atal Behari Vajpayee it is the Vaikos, Ramadasos, Chautals and Abdullas who made the success of the BJP possible. The critics of the BJP, particularly of the Left and secular, might decry this opportunistic strategy, but for the BJP the proof of the pudding is in eating it. The BJP leadership has shown enough resilience to compromise the present to ensure the future.

In contrast the Congress refused to come to terms with the present; instead it chose to cling to the past. It suffered from an exaggerated sense of self-importance and a misplaced trust in its nationalist legacy. It failed to realise that except in a few states the party machinery has corroded, no leadership worth the name existed and that its social base has considerably shrunk. These can hardly be recreated overnight as evidenced by the election results. The sympathetic crowds, which thronged the meetings of Sonia Gandhi, were not translated into votes primarily because the party did not have the machinery to do so. Some of its good candidates, like Manmohan Singh in Delhi, lost to relatively insignificant nominees of the BJP.

Unlike the BJP the Congress wrongly read the political present. It actually lost the election when it failed to provide an alternative after the fall of the BJP government. This failure

was mainly due to a miscalculation of its potential. The only way the Congress could have made a come back was through a coalition government for which several political formations had pledged support. Without seriously pursuing it and declining support to a Left led government the Congress insisted on a single party government, failing which it opted for an election. The unexpected and impressive success in the assembly elections in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh was perhaps the main factor, which influenced this rather intransigent and politically unwise decision.

The Congress thus lost an opportunity to bring the secular forces together. As a consequence the Congress faced the election without any allies, except the highly tainted parties like AIADMK and RJD which instead of advancing its electoral prospects proved to be counter productive. Given the quick changes of government due to the failure of coalitions the Congress hoped to romp home on the plane of stability and single party rule. But a party riven with dissension and desertion could not enthuse such a confidence in the electorate. What actually sealed the fate of the Congress was the lack of allies in a fractured polity in which small parties wielded decisive power in several areas.

Many of them are individual based parties without any clear-cut ideological moorings and therefore could be part of any political formation. While the BJP went out of its way to mop them up the Congress did not try to bring even the like-minded parties to its fold.

The success of the BJP to a large measure is rooted in the failure of the third front to posit a viable alternative to both the Congress and the BJP at the national level. Much before the elections the third front had already disintegrated. The united front experiment of 1996 was short-lived. Its demise

The author is a noted historian of modern India and a prominent commentator on issues relating to communalism in South Asia.

Loss of a Very True Friend

by M Tajul Islam

"Tajul?"
"Yes? Hello! I can hear you."

His voice was choked, obviously trying to control sobbing.

Men, they say, are not supposed to cry.

"Please help me."

"What happened?"

"The pressure on her has become unbearable. She can't stay there any more. She has to come out tomorrow morning. Help me! Please!"

The soft, gentle voice did not need any introduction. The strikingly handsome, pinkish bright young journalist is in love with a fellow journalist. He was working in a news agency and she in a feature syndicate.

His father was an immigrant from UP in India and she, a Bengali, is the daughter of no less a person than a Justice of the High Court. I was a public relations man in WAPDA.

"Keep cool. I'll get back to you."

Totally confused, I lit up a cigarette and paced the room for a long time. He is in trouble and I was the one he could trust and seek help. I cannot let him down. I gathered up my thoughts, chalked out a plan and called him back at his Wari residence at 11:30 pm.

"Tomorrow at 10 o'clock you will come to my house with her and leave the rest with me. Wedding will be arranged, if you both agree."

"How can you do it at such a short notice? It is almost midnight."

"Everything will be done. Inshallah. Don't worry."

By 10 o'clock the next morning, everything was arranged in a great hurry and in utter secrecy — the Kazi, the witnesses, air tickets to Chittagong and the wedding lunch. Shahidul Huq (Late) also nervously showed up at our residence at WAPDA Officers' Quarters at Shahbagh. My colleague Alim did the running-around job. The shaken 'groom' and the bride-to-be turned up with a cool.

After the ceremony and the lunch, Alim took their suitcase in advance to check in at Tejgaon airport. I drove them to the airport and hurriedly pushed them in. Message was sent to Kaptai that a journalist couple was coming for a few days.

Hasan Saeed and Tahmina Ahmed, married on 14 January 1969, left (eloped) for a honeymoon at Kaptai.

Telephones started ringing from the late evening from the Press Club, the newly weds' respective offices and finally from her house. I was a bit scared for one could not take lightly a matter such as this, involving the daughter of a High Court Judge pleading ignorance in mock surprise. I spread the word around that Saeed had

been enquiring for last few days, about accommodation facilities in Khulna. frantic telephones went to the district administration in Khulna to look for the couple in every rest and guest house and hotel. I was very tense. After two days I was scheduled to go to Kaptai to give a talk on public relations. I found the two having a good time with joy rides on a speedboat in Kaptai lake.

"You badmash! Having a good time here and I am facing the music there! Police are looking for you." "Where?" they asked nervously. "Not here in the hills," I said reassuringly, "there in the Sundarbans!" I narrated my concocted story about their whereabouts. We had a hearty laugh. I was back the next day and finally got the anticipated phone call from Mr Justice Abu Muhammad Abdullah, Tahmina's father. I was frightened but kept my cool.

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promises in matters of security. Our adversaries would then find it easy to harm us. They would thrive on our ineffective existence. Whom do we blame?

— Mandira

The author is a (IPS) retired Director General of Border Security Force.

— Mandira

— Yes Sir, registration, religious rites, everything." He heaved a sign of relief. "Please accept him, Sir. He is a very nice boy," I pleaded.

"Since you are in it, I know you will take care of my daughter. Tell them to come back," I said so happy. I quickly phoned Kaptai and told them to return and informed the parents of both of the date and flight number of their return. The couple was moved by the reception by both sides at the airport and were in tears. With the blessings of the parents of both they headed off for home to start a new life.

"Remember", I told him, I am your second father-in-law!"

A few months ago, he told me for the first time how he cherished the desire to make our relationship permanent through our children. It was too late for both our children are now hopefully and happily married. But I was nonetheless started because that was the desire that I had also secretly nurtured. We both smiled and sighed. "Alah Maluk" was his comment.

Every person feels low at times. So did he. But he never

had complaints. We used to share each other's problems and his conclusions had always been "Allah Maluk". I never saw him in a hurry or in haste. Nothing could cause him to violate his self-control. During arguments with friends on any topic I watched with great admiration his unblessel and pragmatic analysis of various issues and he never viewed anything through prejudiced lenses. Whenever any argument turned hot, Saeed would politely steer the confusing debate into sane analysis. If he failed he would resort to non-listening which was the extreme form of his passive aggressive behaviour. He would simply close the door of his mind to mute the sounds of quarrel. No matter on which side of the hot political fence one was, one could not help but immensely like him.

I have not yet gone to our favourite "evening joint of argument" — the Club — since he left, as I would expect him, with his penchant for colourful and ever changing shirts, to quietly glide into the room, smiling at everybody and softly, replying to "How are you" with "So far so good, no complaint; Allah Malik". In a society given to rudeness and bad manners, few could measure up to the standards of his behaviour. As his body was leaving the Press Club after Janaza for the last journey, Syed Fahim Munaim, Managing Editor of The Daily Star murmured, "And there goes a true gentleman".

Did he have any premonition, I wonder, that the end was near? Recently, he voluntarily retired as Dhaka Bureau Chief of Associated Press of America. Was anything bothering or causing him pains? I learned from Tahmina that for some time recently he wore a mournful demeanour, even quietly crying at times, but would not tell her or anybody why. I did not know for he always presented a face of impeccable calm. Even on the day he expired, only hours before his end, he took care to pay up his Club bills! He went home, had lunch, went to bed for a nap and left forever on his last journey to eternity. A perfect gentleman as he was, Saeed left gently, quietly and peacefully.

Although no one could decipher the mysteries of the beginning and the end of life and death, I feel betrayed, as he left so early. I have had the misfortune of writing obituaries of close friends like Shahidul Huq, Anwarul Islam Bobby and now Saeed. I wonder who is left behind to write mine?

Hasan Saeed was a good man. May his good soul rest in peace "eternally so far so good" in the hands of the Malik.

A bit unusual for a medical doctor, I was not surprised when in later days I found articles of the suave and erudite doctor in different newspapers here. He mentions how he got his first article published in the daily Bangladesh Observer at the inspiration and courtesy of celebrated journalist late S M Ali, who was then the editor of that English daily and later became the founder-editor of the "The Daily Star". He kept on writing and I congratulate him for his venture which he took further by bringing out this book.

However, I may be failing in my objective observation unless I point out certain aspects which I feel deserves mention. At times, it appears that description of family members, which of course otherwise constitutes an essential ingredient of such write-ups, is somewhat repetitive although many of them are wellknown by their own rights. His portrayal of the Indian political scene could also be devoted in a larger degree on West Bengal about which he mentioned in the context of his early days but not much about when he was posted in New Delhi. After all, people of this country are keen to know something more about West Bengal and Calcutta like Dr Bidhan Ray, S S Ray, Jyoti Basu, Ghani Khan Chowdhury because of manifold proximity and, if I am not wrong, more about the cultural side of West Bengal and India, which I find not adequate in his book. Arguably, the book is essentially on political matters as the name of it suggests, but mentions of important issues in other spectra of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the larger historical contexts would have made it more embellished.

The 392-page book published by Janus Publishing House, London, is attractive in jacket and printing.

On the whole the writings seem to be quite useful and I believe the book will serve as a meaningful document for many in the present and coming days.

A Refreshing Journey through History

BOOK REVIEW

70 Years in Shaky Subcontinent

by Dr Habibuz Zaman

Janus Publishing co, ltd, London

PP 413 Price £ 12.00

Reviewed by Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

The mention of this demonstrates that Dr Habibuzzaman is a bust of present-day situation and could not remain oblivious of the subjects that create immense interest among our people regardless of the divergent views expressed by the contending parties. Indeed, dwelling on such issues of great public interest is a praiseworthy endeavour while the book comes up with events down from the time of British India, creation of India and Pakistan, and later independent Bangladesh. The compilation of many published articles — in the form of autobiography and portrait — gives one glimpses of many events that describe the sub-continent in different phases of its chequered history ever the last seven decades.

The author, a senior medical doctor, was based at important stations of the sub-continent and also elsewhere in course of his education and work till he returned home from the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a medical doctor in 1988 and resigned to a calm retired life most of which is spent in writing and reading. He was in Calcutta, Dhaka, Karachi and New Delhi during this period and had also been to other countries like the United States which gave him the opportunity to watch things in developed nations as well. The writings include description of his boyhood days at Beniapukur Lane in Calcutta, sojourn and occasional living in the village home in Faridpur district and of later days in Dhaka city, Karachi and lastly New Delhi as a senior WHO adviser. He has worked for more than one and a half decades. He has sought to introduce ele-

ments of political, social and economic situations that were the main features of different times and eventually strike a conclusion that the 70 years of the sub-continent has unquestionably been a "shaky" period. Admittedly, the history is full of both expected and unpredictable developments, and his book contains reading materials of tremendous interest for anyone keen to know about the bygone days and contemporary phase of the sub-continent. The effort of an elder doctor, when viewed from the point of ever-changing scenario of an area that constitutes South Asia today and has more than one billion population, is undoubtedly commendable.

Dr Habibuzzaman began his quest for portraying the turbulent sub-continent from the days of his alma-mater "Little Flower School" and "St Xavier's School" and has stretched up to the recent political and other conditions in our country. The journey is long no doubt and to expect that it would cover virtually everything is a height of folly. Nevertheless, he has not omitted the Second World War in the context of its impact on British India and later freedom of India and Pakistan. He is conscious of the divides of the Bengal and non-Bengal as well as Muslims and Hindus as reflected in the chapter "Cultural divide" just on the eve of the partition and graphically mentioned the poker game of power in the initial years of Pakistan in the chapter like "Game of musical chairs" where the leading figures of political drama — both in terms of appreciation and critical refer-

ences — have found their places. He concludes the book with the chapter "Are we worthy of the martyrs of 1971?" in which he echoes much of the sentiments of most of our people about the turn of events in the country particularly about the countless valiant martyrs of liberation war. Needless to say, the questions raised by him largely reflect the dismay and frustration that we often give vent to vis-avis expectations in Bangladesh today. However, he has not missed out the silver lining in the otherwise dark cloud.

I had the occasion of knowing Dr Habibuzzaman during the early eighties in New Delhi where I was posted as a journalist and he, as mentioned above, as the WHO adviser. His penchant for conversations on political and other issues was obvious. I had the opportunity of coming across some of the wellknown names in India during such conversations. As far as I remember, Dr Mohammad Khalilullah, the famous cardiologist, who was the doctor for prime minister Indira Gandhi, was one of them. I had the good fortune of getting myself checked by him at the GB Hospital in New Delhi.

Dr Zaman used to take a great degree of interest on different developments which was

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HELLO, MAY I SPEAK WITH THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD?

NO

CATS CAN'T TALK

HELLO? HELLO?

16-Z GARDNER

by Jim Davis

BY JAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK

AT A HASTILY-CALLED MIDNIGHT MEETING IN THE OFFICES OF THE TRANS-WORLD DOMESTICUMS CABINET MINISTER SIR RANDAL RIDOUT HEARS THE APPALING NEWS OF M'S KIDNAPPING

YOU REALISE THIS WILL HAVE TO GO TO THE PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF?

WE DO, SIR RANDAL... BUT AS YOU KNOW, HE'S FLOWN TO WASHINGTON... SO IT SEEMS WE MUST PROCEED ON OUR OWN

THE HEAD OF THE SECRET SERVICE ABDUCTED IN ENGLAND — UNDER YOUR VERY NOSES... A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH, GENTLEMEN!

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