

Trying to be a first-rate reporter on the average American newspaper is like trying to play Bach's 'St. Matthew's Passion' on a ukulele.  
*Baghdikian's Observation*

## Gearing up for Panchayat Polls

The coming panchayat elections will be very important for both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP: for the TMC to retain its unchallenged position in rural Bengal and for the BJP to make dents in the ruling party's bastions. Ram Navami which falls next Sunday has now become an occasion for muscle-flexing by the two adversaries. Last year the BJP took out marches on the Ram Navami day carrying arms. On this year's Ram Navami day, too, the party was determined to repeat its performance. The West Bengal Government has banned display of arms in the processions. But the BJP said the order will be defied. Now the TMC has decided to observe Ram Navami in its own way. This is an admission that it can no longer ignore the political challenge thrown by the BJP.

The political temperature is rising in rural Bengal, portending clashes between the two parties. Numerically, the BJP is not a very strong force yet in West Bengal, but being the party that rules the country from Delhi it is likely to make up for its numerical weakness by bringing workers from other States and liberally using its immense resources. Even using money and muscle power, the party may not register more than marginal gains and break the domination of the TMC. The danger lies elsewhere. One side will try to polarize the electorate on religious lines. The other side, too, willy nilly, will be forced to counter it. How far the social fabric of rural Bengal will remain undamaged is the moot point. For a political party claiming to be secular, trying to compete with its rival using the same method may not bring any additional gain but may harm its secular and democratic image.

The BJP will be happy to find that all its political opponents including the Congress, are gradually being forced to keep the majority community in good humour by resorting to what has come to be named as 'soft Hindutva'. But in this game the other parties stand no chance of winning. Soft Hindutva can pose no challenge to hard Hindutva. Secular forces will have to take a strong ideological stand and combat those forces which do not acknowledge the fact that India is a multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country; those forces which do not see that each different cultural mosaic fits into the rich cultural tapestry called India. India is a country which has unity in diversity. Any attempt to replace unity with uniformity will not succeed but will only bring disaster.

# LS polls in 2019: Opposition's task

## REFLEX ACTION

Nitya Chakraborty

BJP the stage is set and now, the opposition parties led by the Congress, BJD, Trinamool, NCP and JD(U) should discuss in details the best ways to bring about this understanding.

Only last month, there was a big debate in the saffron camp about the desirability of preponing the Lok Sabha elections in 2018- some BJP think tank even suggested that this should be held in May/June 2018 along with the pending assembly elections since BJP's fortunes are diving and the Prime Minister with some image still left, can salvage the situation if the Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the remaining states, are held simultaneously. This feeling was intense after the BJP's dismal performance in the by elections in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and now with the trouncing of the BJP in its bastion Uttar Pradesh, the murmurs are getting stronger and it will be no surprise if the Lok Sabha elections are held before November this year.

Despite the hype in the media and the propaganda by the Government agencies, the BJP's think tank who worked for the mission 272 in 2014 Lok Sabha elections, is worried. Their latest study predicts that their 282 seats secured in 2014 Lok Sabha elections will be declining gradually and if the elections are held in December 2018, the BJP will still be in a position to retain 217 seats. This may be less the majority but this will give BJP bargaining power to form a government by inducing others to form a coalition with 272 seats. But if the Lok Sabha elections are held in May 2019, the BJP seats will go down below 200 and then it will be

impossible for BJP to bid for the government. This analysis was done much before the results of the UP by elections came out. So, the trends now indicate that it will not be impossible to bring down the BJP seats to less than 150 which is the reflection of the real strength of the BJP. This can be done if the leading opposition parties work with aggression and keenness to defeat the saffron forces in the Lok Sabha elections. Congress President Rahul Gandhi has been talking of unity of secular forces against fascist elements. He has been aggressive against the RSS and BJP these days. That is a good sign. But the Congress has to function as one of the equals, though the Party will certainly lead in the anti-BJP battle in most of the states.

There is every possibility now that the CPI(M) leadership will finally agree for an understanding with the Congress to defeat the BJP in the coming elections. It is of no use to talk of changing policies when the BJP with all the powers wielded by due to its presence in the centre and the states, are making all efforts to expand its fascist ideas. This BJP has to be removed from power and for that defeating the Party in both assembly and Lok Sabha elections, is crucial. This cannot be done without the unity of anti-BJP forces including the Congress. The Congress under Rahul Gandhi is ready to collaborate with the Left to take on the BJP. The CPI has agreed. The CPI(M) also has to do affirmative action at its Hyderabad Party Congress in April this year. It has thus to be three stage unity for the Left and democratic forces. First the unity of the left forces themselves, second the unity of the regional parties and this has to be followed by a firm understanding with the Congress on taking on the BJP. The opposition parties have scored in some of the recent battles, but the war in Lok Sabha elections has to be won to protect the ideals and values of the Indian nation and polity (IPA)



Girls use umbrella to protect themselves from the direct sun during a hot summer afternoon in Lucknow

# Politics in Hindi heartland

To say that politics is fragile is to bend with the wind. If anything, politics takes oxygen through democracy's fault lines. A particular party is rejected by the voter and politics peaks - EVM fraud! The machines are working for the ruling party and we don't have the time-technology to dispatch The Terminator back in time to assassinate the EVM, so let's characterise and assassinate the Election Commission.

Cool. But Wednesday's bypoll results in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have once and for all put to rest the ghosts of EVM fraud. Even machines have souls but there's no way they can be tampered with, not when they have belly-buttons that are shut tight against the human finger to fiddle with. Hello, what are you ranting about, did anybody even say EVM fraud? Not Mayawati, not Akhilesh and neither was Arvind Kejriwal or Mamata Banerjee - the usual suspects - speaking of EVM fraud this time, are they? Look at who are the winners, the people's picks. The voter is always right. Artificial intelligence cannot override human intelligence. Yogi Adityanath is bad but not that bad as to deny victory to rightful victor. That said, let's

get this straight: "It requires skill for an incumbent to lose a by-election; it requires even greater skills to lose if by-elections are in seats held by the CM and the deputy CM; and, it requires extraordinary talent to lose it when you are in charge of both the Centre and state. The BJP achieved precisely this feat." So, don't blame the EVM; machines are not talented folk. And, mind you, the Election Commission is autonomous, OK. Excuses are for us to throw about, not yours to bandy with. So, to quote the aforesaid source again, "If you needed a sign of both the fragility of politics and robustness of democracy, the by-election results from Uttar Pradesh have just offered it." That is the #GotchaMoment for the left-liberal who is a snowflake that melts in the benign glare of victory but rages in the malignant flame of rejection. Two months short four years ago, the NDA won 73 of UP's 80 Lok Sabha seats. Wow! A messy coalition was avoided. Then, a year ago, the BJP got 325 (Wow! Wow!) Assembly seats in the state and the EVM was in danger of being lynched. But god saved the machine and, in any case, John Connor was an

American, why should he time-transport himself to Lucknow-2017 to rescue democracy from machinations? March 14, 2018 changed all that. The SP-BSP informal alliance was a machine-killer, the EVM manipulators stood no chance against this safe combination. In Gorakhpur and in Phulpur, the Yadav and the non-Yadav OBC, the Muslim and the Nishad; and the Dalit got together to create favourable vibes for the machines to not act funny. And like the trends and the victories showed, there was neither any 'hawa' nor 'hawai' to the aid of the vanquished. RIP.

Both Maurya and the Yogi later said they failed to see the SP-BSP combination clicking. This was local issues trumping national, the Yogi said, without his trademark 'Muhe Lagta Hai'. The prognosis: A year from now UP-chefs can trot out kichdi recipes and India will be saved. Children will be able to cheat openly in examinations in Bihar and UP. Criminals can

## FOCUS

Sushil Kutty

loitier without the fear of the encounter. A buffalo goes missing and there will be police to walk it back home. Romeo will get to woo his Juliet. And the humble potato will not be dumped outside landmark buildings. Caste politics has made a comeback. Candidate selection will be the key. Rules of anti-incumbency will rule - "Politics has returned to normal in the Hindi heartland." That being said, EVMs will function fine. No more excuses for getting drubbed at the hustings of EVM. No more protests outside the Election Commission. And, failor succeed, "Modiji" will get another chance to show his "Midas touch".

Chanakya Amit Shah can re-drag every BJP worker to the booth to restart the Modi-Shah juggernaut. The core BJP supporters - urban voters stayed home in Phulpur and Gorakhpur. They need to be coaxed out. And Yogi Adityanath will hopefully link at the cow with different eyes.

He will maybe stick to his diet-plan and let the people stick to theirs. What is in the plate should remain on the plate and not spill out in Kasganj and Muzaffarnagar. And BJP, don't forget, the flag is to hoist, not foist. What about the Congress, is the party over for Rahul Gandhi? Not by a long shot. A Congress-Mukt Bharat - not yet! Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh are not SP-BSP turf, they are Congress spreads along with being BJP-des. Mayawati is the only politician who has diehard supporters who will vote as per her diktat, a phenomenon unique to her, but Mayawati casts no shadow in these states and neither can Akhilesh cycle to these parts without getting punctured.

Their informal alliance may not last. They are limited to Uttar Pradesh and both will want to outscore the other in UP to have the upper-hand in the LS. An alliance will also unleash rebel candidates from both parties. So the Congress stands a good chance. Congress or BJP it will be good for India if there is no kichdi-blend food that will only beget a sallow complexion, weak constitution. Down with Kichdi-Pulao. (IPA)

**Conventional Crossword**

1		2	3	4	5	6
8	9	10				11
12			13	14		
15				16	17	18
	20	21	22	23		
24			25			
26						
			28			
27						

- ACROSS**
- Small spots
  - Wet, soft earth
  - Container
  - Sucking fish
  - Uncooked
  - Love god
  - Skin eruption
  - Uneven as if gnawed away
  - Written defamation
  - Quick
  - Female horse
  - Swimming organ
  - Dodged
  - Call up
  - Lump on skin
  - Heavy hammer
- DOWN**
- Merry frolic
  - Bridges
  - Citrus
  - Planet
  - American state
  - Early freshness
  - Make a mistake
  - Cow's call
  - Give life to
  - Widow
  - Before
  - Shelf of rock
  - Numerals
  - Soon
  - Grounds
  - Not many

**SUDOKU: 2155**

		9						
	5	2	3	1				
8		1	2	6				
		4					1	
9	7			2			8	4
	2						9	
			8	4	1			5
			6	5	2	4		
						8		

**Yesterday's Solution 2154**

2	1	3	9	8	5	6	4	7
5	8	9	6	7	4	2	1	3
6	4	7	2	1	3	8	5	9
9	2	8	7	5	1	3	6	4
3	6	1	4	2	9	5	7	8
7	5	4	8	3	6	1	9	2
8	7	5	1	9	2	4	3	6
4	3	2	5	6	7	9	8	1
1	9	6	3	4	8	7	2	5

**Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 163**

	V	I	M		H	A	R	P	
S	E	E	R		B	E	R	E	
P		N	E	B		T	I	L	T
E	M	U		R	A	I	D		
L		S	P	I	C	E		C	
L		I	N		U	R	E	O	
		M	E	E	T		A	I	M
A	V	I	D		E	G	G	E	
P		R				N	E	W	T
T	E	E	M			C	U	R	

**DISCLAIMER**  
The views in the articles published here are absolutely the views of the author and The Echo of India does not stand liable for them.