

When you go into court you are putting your fate into the hands of twelve people who weren't smart enough to get out of jury duty.
Norm Crosby

Role of Election Commission

The Election Commission has announced that polling for the Himachal Pradesh Assembly will be held on November 9 but the poll results will be announced after 40 days, on December 18, so that the Himachal results do not influence voters in Gujarat where Assembly polls are due to be held within 15 days of the Himachal elections. The EC was expected to announce the poll dates of both the Assemblies on the same day. But it has not done so. The Congress has alleged that the EC did not announce the Gujarat polls simultaneously because the BJP had put pressure on it to keep the announcement on hold till October 16 because Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to address an election rally in Gujarat on that date where he is expected to announce some schemes for Gujarat ahead of the elections. The Congress charge is, on the face of it, quite plausible.

The role of the Election Commission in a parliamentary democracy is important in ensuring that the polls are free and fair and reflective of the will of the people as that of the judiciary in protecting the citizenry from arbitrary and unconstitutional acts and decisions of the Executive. It was the highly controversial and now almost forgotten former Chief Election Commissioner T. N. Seshan who had asserted that the Election Commission was not the Election Commission of the Government of India but the Election Commission of India. People expect the EC to be impervious to political pressures from any quarters, especially the ruling party. If the EC loses credibility with the people, it will only weaken the foundations of parliamentary democracy.

Also, delaying the publication of the results of an Assembly poll by nearly a month and a half, on the specious plea that it may influence the voters of another State, is untenable. But the EC has been doing it with impunity for years. A statutory provision is now required to fix a time limit for the EC to announce poll results after the counting is over. If elections in several States are held over a few months, can the EC withhold declaring the result of the polls held in the first State three or four months earlier till all the elections have been held? Will it not be a travesty of democracy? The EC should always bear in mind that it is not only necessary for it to be impartial and above political pulls and pressures, but must be seen to be so.

2019: Signs of anti-incumbency

REFLEX ACTION

Amulya Ganguli

No one says any more that the "ache din" are here, while those like Omar Abdullah and Nitish Kumar, who claimed that Narendra Modi faced no challenges, have fallen silent. Even the boasts about the BJP ushering in a Congress-mukt Bharat have died down.

Instead, we have seen the unusual spectacle of the redoubtable Amit Shah breaking away from his Jan Raksha (save the people) padayatra in Kerala to rush to Delhi for a round of consultations with Modi and others to save the party from a critical political and economic situation. What is noteworthy is that it has taken a mere three and a half years for the BJP to slip from its earlier position of being the lord of all it surveys to one where its grip on power is perceptibly less secure. It isn't only the economic slowdown which has landed the BJP in trouble. An equally potent cause is the atmosphere of what the former BJP minister and now a trenchant critic of the government, Yashwant Sinha, has called "darr" or fear in large parts of the country. The primary victims of the fear are the minorities. Strangely, it isn't communal riots on the 2002 Gujarat pattern which have unnerved them, but an underlying atmosphere of unease and uncertainty which makes them wary and nervous about almost every step they take, not knowing when they may fall foul of the Hindutva Gestapo.

The three typical cases which may have intensified their dread of not knowing when they may be done to death are those of Mohammed Akhlaq, Pehlu Khan and Junaid Khan. Akhlaq was having a meal with his family in a Delhi suburb when he was killed by a mob on the suspicion that beef was being consumed. Pehlu Khan was killed while transporting cattle through a Rajasthan town for which he had the requisite permit, but which the gaarakshak

signed as they were convinced that he was either taking the cows for slaughter or for smuggling. And Junaid was killed following a quarrel over seat sharing in a local train near Delhi, and because he "looked Muslim".

It is the assumption of authority by those who are not formally authorized to wield it simply because they belong to the ruling dispensation which has been slowing undermining the BJP's position. The BJP's success in 2014 was based on the faith which the people had placed in Modi's promise of "vikas". But what the electorate hadn't bargained for was to be held hostage to the party's concept of what constitutes patriotism and what does not. Never before in Indian history has so much emphasis been placed on testing a citizen's nationalist credentials. So much so that Union ministers and chief ministers haven't hesitated from insisting that unless a person says, Bharat Mata Ki Jai, he may be in danger of being deported to Pakistan—the BJP's preferred place of exile for perceived anti-nationals. The BJP might have got away with its hyper-nationalism if "vikas" had taken place.

The average person who was assured of a regular income might have dismissed the focus on patriotism as an aberration which could be endured if only because he could seek succour from the judiciary in extreme cases of intimidation and harassment. But the common man will

resent having to run the gauntlet of the BJP's test of patriotism in the context of the failed promise of development. This is the crux of the BJP's present problem. To make matters worse for the ordinary citizens, the dissenters among them have to face a barrage of abuses from what used to be known as Internet Hindus and are now called trolls.

These vicious users of foul language have always been a part of the saffron network. In the pre-Internet days, they used to send handwritten post cards and inland letters full of vulgar allusions to the characters of the receiver's female family members. Now they have graduated to Twitter, Facebook, blogs and emails. But their hate for the suspected secessionists remains undiminished. Their animosity towards the anti-nationals has also found expression in outright killings such as that of the woman journalist, Gauri Lankesh, who has been called a "prestigious" by a saffron blogger. It is an insulting term, which is much favoured by the former army chief and present Minister of State for Defence, VK Singh.

It is this atmosphere of venom and vitriol which is eroding the BJP's base, leaving it only with its core supporters and persuading those to drift away who do not look on the minorities with a jaundiced eye or think that all opponents of the B JP are traitors. What is more, this vitiated environment is not a new phenomenon. It has been present from the time when a number of writers, academics, filmmakers and other members of the intelligentsia returned their awards and made groups of retired bureaucrats and army veterans warn the government of the growing intolerance. This sense of disquiet has only increased, raising doubts whether it will be an easy win for the BJP in 2019. (IPA)



A couple poses for a photo in front of the downtown Los Angeles skyline, California, U.S. --REUTERS

Needed: Anti-BJP consolidation

FOCUS

Nitya Chakraborty

After more than forty months of the NDA rule led by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the ecopolitics of the country is at a crossroads. The Modi bubble is steadily bursting. All sections of the population are aggrieved -- from the poorest section in the rural areas to the major sections of the industrialists who have no tie ups with the BJP leadership. The BJP leadership is still dreaming to come back to power once again in 2019 Lok Sabha elections depending on the organizational power of the party, the RSS muscle power and the disunity in the opposition ranks. An anti-BJP consolidation in the polity of the country which the BJP leadership, especially the Prime Minister fears most.

Only a few weeks are left before the crucial state assembly elections in Himachal and Gujarat, but the opposition parties are yet to come out with a total unity to face the BJP in both the assembly elections and also outside in the struggles to focus the urgent issues of the day, especially the precarious situation in the job market, including the continuing job losses in the key sectors of the industries. The farmers are fighting over their distress but

compared to the dimension of the crisis, their movements also have not got a pan India focus with the participation of the opposition parties. At individual parties level as also at the level of some trade unions and peasants organisations, demonstrations have been held but that do not really give its vent to the real anger of the masses. The alienation of the Modi regime is taking place fast from its own mass base but the opposition is failing to take the advantage because the feeling is still there that the alternative to Modi is too weak and not formidable.

This scenario can suddenly change if the opposition parties including the Congress, the anti-BJP regional parties, and the Left form a formidable combination on the basis of a minimum programme and intensify their joint battle against the Modi regime with the ultimate objective of unseating the BJP in both the state assembly and the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. On October 11, at an event marking the birth anniversary of Jayaprakash Narayan, former Law Minister of the Morarji Desai Government at the centre Shanti Bhushan said that the 2019 Lok Sabha elections will decide the future of democracy in this country and the

total unity of the opposition can only defeat the forces of anti-democracy represented by the BJP and the Narendra Modi. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury who spoke at the event said that opposition parties should come together to fight the multiple challenges the Indian democracy faces today and if complete unity is not possible, they should march separately and strike together.

91 wise men of the CPI(M) central committee have to decide what the CPI(M) members will be doing in the constituencies in Himachal and Gujarat where they have no candidates. In Gurusapur parliamentary by election, the CPI told its members to vote for the candidate between Congress and the AAP who has the best chance to defeat the BJP candidate. But in assembly elections, coming to power by the BJP is the issue and if BJP has to be weakened, the Left has to see that it does not come to power and what is the best way to

ensure that. Here the question comes about the relationship with the Congress. The Congress is the major party fighting the BJP in both Himachal and Gujarat. There are other non-BJP parties with small bases in both the states. It will be best for opposition unity if the Congress talks with the other smaller parties and come to some understanding on seat sharing. If a formal alliance is not possible. The objective must be to ensure that the anti-BJP votes are not wasted. Even the CPI and the CPI(M) can have some limited understanding with the Congress in these two states to protect their respective bases. The Congress can get a boost by having electoral understanding (if alliance is not possible) with the Left. Similarly some understanding is possible with the NCP and the BSP in Gujarat.

This is the strategy which is on the line of what Yechury said moving separately but striking together. CPI(M) central

committee members lost a big chance in their July meeting in creating an atmosphere of all out unity against the BJP by taking a rigid line on relationship with the Congress. If they do it this time also, a historic opportunity to catapult the left to an important position in the national politics of the country will be lost and this will be of big relief to the BJP. The Congress under Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi is not in a supreme position. They are also vulnerable and need support from others. Rahul Gandhi can be persuaded to delink the Congress programme from the earlier neo liberal policies.

He is now talking in a new language. The CPI(M) CC should see how the Communist Party of Britain is dealing with the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in influencing the economic programme. There can be no opposition unity without leading participation of the Congress which is the main party fighting the BJP in the states. And the Left is a pale shadow of 2004 and 1996. The CPI(M) central committee should recognize that if its general secretary Sitaram Yechury is not allowed to opt for the line of striking at the common enemy together, it will only add to its number of historical blunders. (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					
27			28		

- 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
 - Cicatrix
 - Planet
 - American state
 - Early freshness
 - Make a mistake
 - Cow's call
 - Give life to
 - Wicked
 - Before
 - Shell of rock
 - Numeral
 - Score
 - Golf mounds
 - Not many

SUDOKU: 1996

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Yesterday's Solution 1995

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

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 004

	V	I	M		H	A	R	P
S	E	E	R		R		E	
P	N	E	B		T	I	L	T
E	M				R	A	I	D
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A	V	I	D		E	G	G	E
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