

Opinion

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2019

THE MANDATE THAT Mr Narendra Modi received is undeniably huge. Of course, there have been occasions in the past when a political party got more seats than 303 in a Lok Sabha election. Some examples are Indira Gandhi in 1980 (353) and Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 (404). But the circumstances were different: Indira Gandhi had waged a brave struggle against an unpopular coalition government, suffered many forms of harassment including imprisonment, and almost single-handedly won back the support of the people who had defeated her party and her (in Rae Bareilly). In the case of Rajiv Gandhi, he rode a wave of sympathy that had been triggered by the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Broad voter support

Not only the number of seats won (303), but the sweep and scale of the BJP's victory are astounding. The BJP could not penetrate only three states — Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The margins were unbelievably large, too large by conventional standards in a straight contest between two parties (as it was in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Assam).

While there are no authentic numbers, polls and surveys have affirmed that, as expected, the upper castes voted in large numbers for the BJP across the Hindi-speaking and Hindi-knowing states. So did the Other Backward Classes and, surprisingly, a significant proportion of Dalits, Muslims and Christians. Their motivations may have been different, but the fact is they gave their votes to the BJP.

Got votes, not trust

Mr Narendra Modi, I think, is happy but not satisfied. There is something that he has discerned which, perhaps, others in his party have failed to grasp: that it is not enough to get the votes of the Dalits, the Muslims, the Christians and the very poor, it is necessary to win their trust. He knows that he did not enjoy their trust at the end of his first term and has, therefore, added *Sabka Vishwas* to his original slogan *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*.


It is a smart move, but it is fraught with difficulties. The obvious hurdles have names — Mr Giriraj Singh, Ms Sadhvi Niranjani Jyoti and Mr Sanjeev Balyan. There are others, elected but discarded or elected and waiting — Mr Mahesh Sharma, Mr Anant Kumar Hegde, Mr Sakshi Maharaj, Ms Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur and others unknown.

Mr Giriraj Singh, a Cabinet minister, has already made an unwarranted remark on two allied party leaders attending an iftar party. He earned a rebuke from the president of the BJP, but he has not expressed regret. After his election, Mr Sakshi Maharaj visited a prisoner (an MLA accused of rape in an incident in Unnao that shook the nation in 2017) to thank him for his victory. He has not been rebuked so far.

It is not easy to get rid of prejudices that have been ingrained since childhood or youth. It doesn't help if senior leaders of the RSS and BJP give expression to these prejudices from time to time ('electricity for Eid, no electricity for Diwali', 'constituency where minority is majority'). It doesn't help if the

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Will Mr Modi win sabka vishwas?



Prime Minister Narendra Modi after his swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi

REUTERS

lynching of Dalits and Muslims does not stop and at least one case is reported every week. It doesn't help change perceptions if the BJP has one elected MP from the Muslim community among its 303 members.

Fear, welfare

There is another formidable problem. The BJP can win the trust of these sections only if two conditions are fulfilled today; it would be interesting to see how the government goes forward to fulfill these two conditions.

Banishing fear among certain sections of the people requires bold steps. Every time there is an act of impunity,

the act and the actor must be punished. Will the BJP punish those who act with impunity and spread fear? It is a big ask, on present evidence it does not seem likely, but I hope that the BJP's leadership will assert its authority over those who indulge in culpable behaviour.

The second condition is, objectively, not entirely under the control of the government. The economic status of the disaffected sections will begin to improve only if they get more jobs; more job security; higher incomes; and better access to public goods and services. Jobs and incomes are a function of high and equitable economic growth and, given how the year 2018-19 ended on a dismal note, high or equitable growth is not around the corner.

The sections of the Dalits, Muslims, Christians and below-the-poverty-line,

I suspect, voted for the BJP's candidate because no other candidate seemed capable of winning the contest and certainly no other candidate appeared to be on the 'winning' side. It was a vote of prudence; it was not a vote of confidence. The BJP has to do much more to win their confidence.

It is an unusual situation. The BJP has formed the government with the votes of passionate supporters (in whose eyes Mr Modi can do no wrong) and the votes of disaffected sections (in whose eyes Mr Modi has not done anything right so far).

It will be interesting to see how the resourceful Mr Modi navigates these uncharted waters.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Pecking order

Rajnath Singh was belatedly included in additional Cabinet committees after the normally pliable minister made known his unhappiness. Though Singh may be officially No. 2 in Cabinet hierarchy, few dispute that Amit Shah ranks next only to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in real terms. That Shah will depute for the PM in his absence was evident even before the Cabinet committees were constituted. Shah summoned a meeting of the ministers of finance, external affairs, railways, commerce and petroleum at his office to discuss petroleum import and aid to Mozambique, subjects which have nothing to do with his ministry. While none of Modi's ministers dared object to the order of precedence at the swearing-in, some officials in the foreign office are getting hot under the collar that their minister, S Jaishankar, is tenth in ranking, although traditionally the ministry never occupies lower than third or fourth place. The foreign minister also has to share his territory with NSA Ajit Doval, like in Modi's first tenure. Jaishankar, then foreign secretary, and Doval had reached an understanding of division of work. Doval handled Pakistan, immediate neighbours and the Middle East, while Jaishankar focused on the big powers, the US, China Russia, Japan and Europe. Doval was reportedly taken aback at the return of Jaishankar, that too with the rank of Cabinet minister. But soon, the PM had elevated Doval to the same rank.

Silent sulking

Nitish Kumar was the only NDA ally to publicly express unhappiness with the BJP's big brother role in allotment of ministerial slots, but others too nurse a grievance. Ram Vilas Paswan had presumed that his MP son, Chirag Paswan, would be included and the party's executive even passed a resolution to this effect. Parkash Singh Badal wanted his son Sukhbir Badal to be made a minister, but the BJP opted for Sukhbir's wife Harsimrat Kaur. The BJP persuaded Sukhbir that it was in his interest to continue in state politics.

Pawar punch

Congress leaders are puzzled over Rahul Gandhi's deference to NCP chief Sharad Pawar, of whom Sonia Gandhi had been deeply suspicious. After the Lok Sabha polls defeat, the Congress president was unavailable to party members, but he called on Pawar and they met for two hours. During the

ticket distribution too, Rahul had ignored phone calls from frantic Maharashtra leaders, including state chief Ashok Chavan, that powerful Shiv Sena defector Suresh Dhanorkar be given a party ticket. It was only after Pawar telephoned him that Rahul agreed. Ironically, the Sena defector was the only Congressperson to win from Maharashtra.

Message in meet

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath's surprise call on PM Narendra Modi accompanied by his son Nakul was meant to send a signal to his party the Congress. The veteran Congressperson is unhappy that Rahul Gandhi made a scathing reference to CMS canvassing for tickets for sons. In fact Nakul was the only Congressperson to win in MP. Nath, whose government is vulnerable post polls, abstained from the CWC meeting that followed the results.

Bengal and stars

That Mamata Banerjee is star-struck is reflected in her choice of Trinamool candidates. Newly elected Mimi Chakraborty, 30, and Nusrat Jahan, 29 — part of the Trinamool Tollywood contingent to the Lok Sabha — created a buzz in the capital. The others are senior stars Shatabdi Roy and Dev (Deepak Adhikari), who seldom attends Parliament. Banerjee had even nominated Mithun Chakraborty to the Rajya Sabha. Incidentally, the BJP's Bengal contingent is unhappy that out of its 16 MPs from the state, only two, Babul Supriyo and Debasree Chaudhuri, were appointed ministers of state. The Bengal unit feels that a berth should have been given to actress Locket Chatterjee, who joined the BJP as early as 2015.

No poll needed

Sonia Gandhi was renamed chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) on June 1, with party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala claiming that the election of the party's Lok Sabha leader would be held later. In fact, in 1998, Pranab Mukherjee had tweaked the CPP rules giving its chairperson the powers to appoint both the leaders of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha of the party. The delay is because it is unclear whether Rahul wants the job. If Rahul does not become the leader, which is an onerous and time-consuming responsibility, the competition would be between Shashi Tharoor, who made it known that he is willing, and Manish Tewari, who is the preferred choice of party seniors.

Give 'em hope, Jo'anna

South Africa looks to be in crisis after three successive defeats at the ongoing World Cup

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty



NATHAN COULTER-NILE, Steve Smith and Mitchell Starc were the chief architects of Australia's 'la decima' - 10 ODI wins on the spin. After Coulter-Nile and Smith did it with the bat, Starc bagged a five-for, as Australia eked out a hard-fought victory in their World Cup fixture against West Indies at Trent Bridge. Their golden run in One-Day International, is basically a story of a happy unit, support staff included, working in unison.

This column is not about Australia's recent success. Rather, it's about South Africa, a team that looks to be in crisis after three successive defeats at the ongoing World Cup. But as we would move along, the prelude is necessary to capture the contrast.

Over the past 18-odd months, starting January 1, 2018, Starc has featured in just



South Africa's Faf du Plessis shakes hands with India's Rohit Sharma at the end of their match

REUTERS

nine ODIs. Injuries had been a reason why the left-arm tearaway quick from New South Wales missed a hell lot of international cricket. But credit to the Cricket Australia (CA) and the Australian team management that they didn't push their premier fast bowler. Starc was allowed to recover at his own pace and play at his own comfort. The Australian cricket setup managed him brilliantly to ensure he goes full throttle at the quadrennial showpiece.

Over to South Africa now, and the trouble started with Dale Steyn's premature exit from the Cup without playing a game. At 36 years of age, Steyn is in the autumn of his career, and he has been struggling with injuries over the past three seasons. That he still came to play the IPL before the World Cup was a wrong choice made by the entire South African cricket setup including the player. Steyn played only two games in the IPL before yet again picking up a

right shoulder injury. "Unfortunately, it happened there in the IPL in those two games that he played there. If he didn't get picked up to go to the IPL, who knows where Dale would have been right now," South Africa captain Faf du Plessis lamented. But the damage was done.

Lungi Ngidi, an exciting young fast bowler, clutched his hamstring and left the field during South Africa's second World Cup match against Bangladesh. The Pro-

teas badly missed Steyn's experience and Ngidi's enthusiasm on a responsive pitch against India. Two frontline fast bowlers breaking down during the World Cup didn't send the right message. Something is wrong somewhere.

Former South Africa fast bowler Fanie de Villiers agreed. He, in fact, laid into the system, as he spoke with this correspondent.

"I think I'm very disappointed how they (South Africa) have bowled and I'm disappointed in that they are not performing to the standards they should be performing. Your bowlers are going for 60-plus runs in 10 overs; that's 10-12-15 runs more than their averages, and the reason for this is the fitness level. We are struggling to keep our bowlers fit."

"The system is disappointing not to make sure that the bowlers stay fit and strong enough to cope with today's demands. And they need to really have a look at what it is, because if you have got bowlers the way we have, who are always injured and always not available and always not ready, and they don't get enough game time because of the injuries, I'm afraid, you need to have a look at the bigger system. That's monitoring, controlling, helping, supporting those players to the level that they should be supported," de Villiers, who played 83 ODIs, apart from 18 Tests, in the 1990s and finished with a miserly economy rate of 3.57, observed.

Close on the heels of South Africa's loss against India, came the news that AB

de Villiers wanted to return from his international retirement and play the World Cup. But he was reportedly told by skipper du Plessis, coach Ottis Gibson and convenor of selectors Linda Zondi that it wouldn't be possible. Zondi reportedly told de Villiers to make himself available for the home series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan to be considered for the World Cup selection. Bonkers! The South African cricket hierarchy should have had the intelligence to understand that a legend, and still a match-winner, like de Villiers is allowed to pick and choose. The greats do things on their own terms. To draw a football analogy, Argentina wouldn't have won the 1986 World Cup if Carlos Bilardo — then Argentina manager — had the same set of rules for Pedro Pasculli and Diego Maradona. No disrespect to Rassie van der Dussen, who is batting at No. 4 for South Africa at the World Cup. But replacing de Villiers with him is like junking a Ferrari for a budget car. The Saffers are paying the price.

Talent-drain through the Kolpak route is another issue which is seriously hurting South African cricket. The quota policy — six non-whites in the national team — is a reason why the likes of Duanne Olivier, Kyle Abbott, Rilee Rossouw and several others have decided to end their international career and choose County cricket. Olivier and Abbott would have walked into the South African World Cup squad. The present situation doesn't look rosy. Hope needs to be restored for the future.