

**PCHIDAMBARAM** 

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

# Will Mr Modi win sabka vishwas?

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 Bareli). 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

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 fran-

tic Maharashtra leaders, including state

chief Ashok Chavan, that powerful Shiv

Sena defector Suresh Dhanorkar be given

a party ticket. It was only after Pawar tele-

phoned him that Rahul agreed. Ironically, the Sena defector was the only

Congressperson to win from Maharashtra.

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 refer-

ence 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

That Mamata Banerjee is star-struck is

reflected in her choice of Trinamool can-

didates. 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

Sonia Gandhi was renamed chairper-

son of the Congress Parliamentary Party

(CPP) on June 1, with party spokesperson

Randeep Surjewala claiming that the elec-

tion of the party's Lok Sabha leader would be held later. In fact, in 1998, Pranab

Mukheriee had tweaked the CPP rules

giving its chairperson the powers to ap-

point 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-con-

suming 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.

joined the BJP as early as 2015.

NO POLL NEEDED

CWC meeting that followed the results.

BENGAL AND STARS

MESSAGE IN MEET

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 Niranjan Jyoti and Mr Sanjeev Balyan. There are others, elected but discarded or elected and waiting -Mr Mahesh Sharma, Mr Anantkumar Hegde, Mr Sakshi Maharaj, Ms Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur and others un-

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 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 BIP can win the trust of these sections only if two conditions are fulfilled. The first condition is that no one should live in fear. The second condition is that their economic status should steadily improve. Neither condition is 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 BIP'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**



#### 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

### **OUT OF MY MIND**



**MEGHNAD DESAI** 

YOU WIN the toss. Your first batsman takes a huge swipe at the first ball hoping to score a six. He gets caught. The lesson is clear. Governing is not a T20 or even an ODI. It is more like a Test match lasting five years. You have to pace yourself, take care not to waste time or lose wickets. There is

no draw in this game. The Hindi curriculum controversy

brought out the problems Narendra Modi

## **HISTORY HEADLINE**

## A House for MPs

For almost a century, Parliament has been an observer of the people who have shaped our country. But it was not part of the original plan for the Capital city



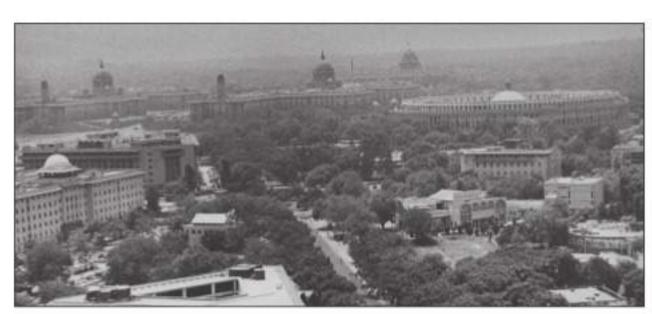
**CHAKSHUROY** 

THE DIN and debate of elections have come to an end. In a few days, the first session of the new Parliament will begin, and the focus of politics will shift to the Parliament House in Delhi. The newly elected MPs of the 17th Lok Sabha will start working in a building which Prime Minister Narendra Modi described as the "Temple of Democracy". For almost a century, the circular edifice of Parliament has been an observer of women and men who have shaped our country. But the most iconic building in Delhi was not part of the original plan for the Capital city.

The Imperial Legislative Council was the legislature for British India from 1861, and was expanded to include elected members in 1909. A question was raised in the British Parliament in 1912, enquiring about the provision for a separate building for the Legislative Council in the new capital city of Delhi. The Under Secretary for India in his reply stated that, "It is proposed that the Legislative Council should meet in a hall which will be situated in one wing of the building which also contains the Governor-General's official residence and the Durbar (Hall)."

So in 1913, when Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens signed on to be the architects for the Imperial City at New Delhi, their brief only included the design of the 'Government House (the present President's House)' and 'Two principal blocks of Government of India Secretariats and attached buildings (North and South Block)'. As part of the Government House, they were to design a Legislative Council Chamber, library and writing room, a pub-

lic gallery and committee rooms. In 1919, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act which provided for a bicameral legislature for India. A new building was needed to accommodate the new houses of the Legislative Council. Baker proposed a triangular building while Lutyens was in favour of a circular Colosseum design for this new building. The committee tasked with overseeing the construction of the new capital decided



An architect slammed Lutyens's design as "a mill-wheel dropped on its side". File

to go ahead with Lutyens's design.

The location of the new building was to be at the base of Raisina Hill. Lutyens also proposed a church behind South Block to create a symmetry with the Council House. But this was not carried through. The circular Council House incorporated three chambers (Council of States, Assembly and Princes). The chambers connected to a large central hall in the middle of the building. However, Lutyens's circular design did not appeal to everyone. Robert Byron, a British writer, art critic and historian, criticised the design in the Architectural Review in 1931. He described the Council House as "a Spanish bull-ring, lying like a mill-wheel dropped accidentally on its side".

After six years of construction, in 1927, the new Council House was inaugurated. At the inauguration, a message from King George V was read out. It stated, "The new capital which has arisen enshrines new institutions and a new life. May it endure to be worthy of a great nation and may in this Council House wisdom and justice find their dwelling place."

The Council House, now known as the Parliament House, has been at the heart of the country's history. The Federal Court (which preceded the Supreme Court) used to function from the Chamber of Princes in the Parliament building. After that, the Supreme Court also sat in the Parliament building from 1950 to 1958.

The deliberation and adoption of the Constitution took place in the Central Hall of Parliament. It was in the Central Hall that Jawaharlal Nehru delivered his famous Tryst with Destiny speech on the eve of Independence. The Central Hall is where the President of India is sworn in and also where he addresses a joint sit-

ting of both Houses at the beginning of a new Lok Sabha and at the opening of the first session of Parliament in a year. Thrice in our parliamentary history, the Central Hall has been witness to a joint sitting of the two Houses for the breaking of a legislative deadlock. The last one was in 2002 when the Houses could not agree on provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill.

The building of Parliament has aged well thanks to constant upkeep. However, the foundation of the lawmaking institution that it houses is slowly getting eroded. Over the years, the regular disruption of parliamentary proceedings has undermined the importance of this temple of

In 1954, then vice-president Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan had visited the US Senate. He was there to present to the Senate an ivory gavel. In the Senate, the proceedings of the assembly are brought to order by the repeated tapping of the gavel. The 169-year-old gavel of the Senate had broken while it was being used by then vicepresident Richard Nixon. While addressing the Senate, Radhakrishnan had said, "On behalf of the young democracy of India and of the Rajya Sabha, I have the honour and the pleasure to present to you, Mr Vice President, this gavel in the earnest hope that the legislators of the Senate will discuss all problems, national and international, with calmness and composure, with freedom from passion and prejudice, with the one supreme object of serving your great people and the human race."

Our country hopes that these words spoken 66 years ago will resonate with the newly elected MPs as they take their seats in Parliament.

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# A Hindi Rashtra? An unwise idea

will face. There is a divide within the BIP like there is in most ideological parties. The core membership has a radical agenda which they wish to implement immediately upon winning power. There will no doubt will be ghar wapsi, love jihad, gau raksha and vigilante attacks before Modi reads the riot act. He has extended the vote beyond what the core membership can deliver by widening the appeal, Sabka Saath, and offering substantial rather than

ideological goods, Sabka Vikas. Hindi is an obsession of the Hindi belt. When the issue came up before the Constituent Assembly, the Hindi belt Congress members defeated Jawaharlal Nehru, who wanted Hindustani as national language, by one vote during a

meeting. In 1965, the insistence on replacing English by Hindi nearly caused the cessation of South India. Lal Bahadur Shastri solved the issue by compromise. Why then start dividing again?

The Hindi belt has to learn that it may be the most populous region, but it is neither the majority nor is it the most socially progressive or prosperous region. South and North East, Gujarat and Maharashtra, Punjab-Haryana are important but separate regions of the nation. Hindi is a relatively recent language, at most 200 years old. Tamil is 4,000 years old. If you want to unite the nation genuinely, then encourage the learning of a South Indian or Northeastern language. Hindi and English are both jointly national languages.

Learning both is a luxury. Studying Tamil, Bengali or Assamese may bind the nation together better.

There is no point in rushing on the cultural front before the material poverty has been tackled. Clean water, energy, good health, adequate income, viable livelihoods, decent education and skills learning should have priority over language wars. Modi won because he began working on this vital list of needs and never talked about Hindutva in five years. The BIP is now the party with a long lease on power. Its Hindi belt core supporters will have to learn not to harm its prospects. Making haste will lead to loss of power.

The BJP may be a Hindu majoritarian

party, but it has to learn that not all Hindus do or should speak Hindi. The Sanatan Dharma takes different forms in different parts of India. It is not a monolith like an Abrahamic religion. Murugan is worshipped only in the South, not in the North. Assam became integrated into Vaisnavism only in the middle of the second millennium of the Common Era, The Scheduled Tribes follow a variety of beliefs across India. "Educating" them into Hinduism will lead to a backlash.

Pakistan is a guide. Despite sharing a religion, language became the reason for the breakaway of East Pakistan. Every linguistic state is a nation with its own history. India is a nation of nations bound together by democracy. Let it be.

#### **FIFTH COLUMN**



TAVLEEN SINGH

# Signs of hope in Kashmir?

THE PRIME MINISTER has a list of urgent things to do in his first hundred days. write on Kashmir this week in the hope that he puts it on this list if it is not already there. I was in Srinagar last month after a long absence. And, was happily surprised to find that a deep fatigue has set in with the jihadists who now lead the militancy. The atmosphere reminded me of Punjab in the Nineties, when ordinary Sikhs began to hate the militants for the savage cruelty with which they had taken to killing the families of policemen. It was these acts of senseless brutality that made the Khalistanis lose their safe houses in Punjab's villages. Something like this is beginning to happen now in the Kashmir Valley.

Since I last came to Srinagar, just before Burhan Wani was killed, there is a new rule that makes stewardesses rush about pulling down window shades as the flight is about to land. But, before they managed to do this I saw that the airport looks from the air like a military encampment. When we left the airport, I noticed that shops on the road that leads to Srinagar have been fenced off by a barrier of thick wire mesh as if to warn visitors that they have entered a war zone. For the rest, Srinagar was as beautiful as ever but desolate because it was almost empty. It was the height of the tourist season, the weather was perfect, but since the Pulwama attack, tourists have stopped coming.

Almost the first person I met was the Governor who, since he dissolved the Legislature, has been in charge of governing the state. I have known Satya Pal Malik since those long ago days when he was a politician in Delhi, but this was my first meeting with him in more than 20 years. The impression I got from an informal and all too brief chat with him was that he is doing a better job of governing the state than Mehbooba Mufti. I am truly delighted that she lost her own election this time because as an old Kashmir hand I can report that I have rarely seen a more useless chief minister. She was administratively incompetent and politically dishonest and the BJP should not have waited so long to dump her. With her gone, it can be said that now could be a good time to find a lasting solution to our oldest political problem.

Not just because a bad chief minister has gone but because Kashmiris seem really sick of the militancy. When I was last in Srinagar, the city was full of tourists and all seemed well, but Burhan Wani was a folk hero. I found this hard to understand after watching those propaganda videos in which he made clear that he wanted to establish an Islamic state in the Kashmir Valley. But, he was a hero in the eyes of many Kashmiris. And became a legend in death.

This time nobody I met said they saw jihadi terrorists as heroes. Even those who said they hated India added quickly that this did not mean they liked Pakistan any better. The other thing nearly everyone said was that they longed for peace to return so that they could go back to living normal lives and their children could one day find decent jobs. Since it is usually violence that gets into the news, it is easy to forget that other than a handful of angry young Kashmiri men, most people long for peace. Easy to forget that these young men were not alive when the movement for 'azadi' began in the Eighties. This makes their reasons for becoming jihadi terrorists even less clear. Whatever their reasons, their num-

bers are small. So this is as good a time as any for the Prime Minister to make a serious effort at bringing peace to the Valley. Not only because there is fatigue evident in the militancy but because Pakistan is broke. It also has too many jihadist problems of its own to sustain the Kashmir insurgency. And, there is a new government in Delhi that can start with a clean slate. For the Prime Minister may I humbly offer a small tip. Everyone I talked to spoke of Atal Bihari Vajpayee with a reverence they seem not to have for any other Indian leader. Maybe his recipe of 'Kashmiriyat, Insaniyat, Jamhooriyat,' may no longer work. We are dealing with jihadists now and not a movement for 'azadi'. But he is revered because he is remembered as truthful.

He was ready to talk to anyone about peace but he made it clear that there would never be 'azadi'. Pakistan knows this and the Kashmiri people know this. So we must hope the Prime Minister can find a new way forward.

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